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The meaning college women make from their television viewing experience : a study using in-depth interviewing.

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THE MEANING COLLEGE WOMEN MAKE FROM THEIR TELEVISION VIEWING EXPERIENCE: A STUDY USING IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWING

A Dissertation Presented

by

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ABSTRACT

THE MEANING COLLEGE WOMEN MAKE FROM THEIR TELEVISION VIEWING EXPERIENCE:
A STUDY USING IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWING

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The purpose of this study was to clarify the meaning college women make from their television viewing experiences. The goals were to: (1) present a meaningful work; (2) contribute to the existing research on women and their subjective experiences with television viewing; (3) help bring women's voices into the center of educational and social science theory and research; (4) inspire other female researchers to examine women's experiences; and (5) encourage self-discovery and empowerment on the part of the participants and readers.

Phenomenological in-depth interviewing and a demographic questionnaire were used to collect the data. Twelve female college students attending a state university participated in the study. Six participants were 18-23 years old and six participants were 30-45 years old.

This study was motivated by the often negative portrayals of women on television, the lack of women's voices in research, and the need for new research methods in relationship to women's experiences.

The data show that the participants were angry that women are negatively portrayed on television.

Television viewing was linked to the formation and maintenance of negative attitudes and beliefs, especially those related to gender issues and self esteem. Television viewing was positively linked to social learning in relation to television women who served as role models.

Television viewing was positively associated with influencing and shaping expectations and beliefs about the world. Television viewing was linked to adopting a view that reflects the violence found on television and to overeating.

The participants were critical of the television media and believed that television media focused on the sensational and negative, did not respect people's privacy, negatively affected legal cases and was too powerful in shaping public opinion.

The older participants felt that they could control their viewing by shutting off the television, changing the channel, canceling cable subscriptions and encouraging other viewers to take an active stand against negative images.

Television viewing increased learning when the participants identified with the television content. Television viewing displaced reading and study time and was linked to loss of creativity and imagination.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to bring about a deeper understanding of the meaning college women make from their television viewing experience. A woman's television viewing experience includes not only her television viewing habits and patterns, but her understanding of how television makes sense to her. There is much written about the educational impact of television and on how women are portrayed on television, but little research exists on the subjective understanding of women's television viewing and the meaning they make of that experience. The issues and questions raised by this study are numerous.

For example, what is it like to be a college woman with a history of watching television? What do college women expect from their television viewing and why do they watch it? What are these women watching? How does television viewing fit into the context of their everyday lives? Do years of watching television affect the way these women see themselves in relationship to others? Given their past and present television viewing experiences, what meaning does television have for them? At a time when women's portrayals on television have been criticized by many media analysts (Comstock, 1989; Douglas, 1994; Huston et al., 1992) as being unrealistic, stereotypical, devaluing and negative, do college women find their television viewing experiences pleasurable, equitable, and empowering? Or, are women absorbing negative messages that affect their ability to develop healthy and realistic attitudes about themselves?

This study was motivated by the researcher's perception of the lack of women's voices in social science research. A literature review showed two recurring themes about women: (1) women's voices were are too often not heard in social science research (Spitzack & Carter, 1987); and, (2) women's voices, especially in relation to women's issues, are seldom heard on television (Douglas, 1994; Southworth, 1991). The combination of these two findings is alarming because it suggests that women's voices, intellectual pursuits and contributions to research and popular culture are not valued. What are the consequences of women not feeling valued? What are the consequences of not allowing women's voices to be heard? Do women learn early in their lives that their voices will not be heard and if they are heard that they will not be taken seriously? Hopefully, this study will help women's voices be heard: as more research concentrates on women's issues from their own perspective, women's lives will be valued more highly.

This study was also motivated by: (1) the need to examine portrayals of women on television more fully, (2) the need for communication research conducted by women, and (3) the need for qualitative research that can more fully document women's experiences. These gaps in the literature contribute to the need for a feminist perspective on television research. Thus, this interdisciplinary study drew from the following disciplines: (1) feminist research, which acknowledged the absence of women's voices in research and the need for new research methods in relationship to women's experiences; (2) communication studies, which provided the tools to analyze portrayals of women on television; and, (3) education and psychology, which helped to analyze the

cognitive and emotional consequences of the portrayals of women on television.

In order to provide a voice for the population being studied, the qualitative research process was used to investigate college women's experiences with television viewing and the meaning they make of those experiences. In this study, the primary methods of research were in-depth phenomenological interviews, following by analyses of transcripts of those interviews. The research sample was composed of twelve college women at a state university located in the North East. The participants included both graduate and undergraduate students. The three criteria for selection were that: (1) the students were female; (2) six students were of traditional college age (18-23 years of age) and six students were of nontraditional college age (30-45 years of age); and, (3) the students must have claimed, through a preliminary interview, that they watched at least eight hours of television per week. In addition, this sample included women from several fields of study and varied life experiences so that I could bring as much balance as possible to the research.

The second method I used to gather demographic information about the participants was a questionnaire. The questionnaire gathered additional information that may have been inappropriate to ask during the interview process. The questionnaire gathered information about academics, family and work background and television access and viewing habits.

The researcher looked for common themes and patterns from both the interviews and the questionnaires in order to report the meaning college women made from their television viewing experiences. Throughout my study, I was particularly careful to craft common themes

that were faithful to the participants' words and to the meanings they made of their experiences.

The goal for this study was to realistically present college women's experiences of television viewing and the meaning they created from their experiences. Another goal was to gather and present the above experiences from the participants' perspective and in their own voices. By listening to, understanding, and reporting women's experiences with television viewing, I hoped to accomplish five things: (1) to present meaningful work that is worthy of others' attention; (2) to contribute to the existing research on women and their subjective experiences with television viewing; (3) to help to bring women's voices into the center of educational and social science theory and research; (4) to inspire other female researchers to examine women's experiences; and (5) to encourage self-discovery and empowerment on the part of the participants and readers of the study.

Following this introduction, Chapter II presents a review of the literature. The review of the literature includes: the dearth of research on women in communication; how much television people watch and why; how women are portrayed on television; the consequences of the portrayals of women on television; and, how television viewing affects cognitive skills and activities. The literature review provides a foundation to analyze how this research contributes to, confirms and contradicts the existing research on women and their television viewing.

Chapter III discusses the research methodology. The discussion includes: a description of the in-depth phenomenological interviewing process; the rationale for the phenomenological in-depth interviewing method; a description of the demographic questionnaire; the method of

selection of participants; time frame for collecting data; participant drop-out rate; protection for the participants; and analysis of the data.

Chapters IV, V and VI report the data. Chapter IV presents the demographic data and the participants' profiles. Chapter V presents the place of television in college women's lives and includes: why the participants watch television; watching television without their families or watching alone; control over viewing; reading and studying in relation to watching television; and eating and television viewing. Chapter VI presents college women's views of the portrayals of women on television. This chapter reports on both negative and positive portrayals of women on television. Also, Chapter VI presents college women's critique of the television media.

Chapter VII discusses the study's findings in relation to existing research on women and their television viewing and demonstrates how the findings from this study contribute to, confirm or contradict the existing research on women and their television viewing. Also, Chapter VII demonstrates how the findings of this study support the methodology. Chapter VIII presents conclusions and recommendations that grow out of this study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter is a review of the literature in relation to the meaning college women make from their television viewing experience. The review of the literature will draw from feminist research, communication studies, education and psychology, and will include: (1) the dearth of research on women in communication; (2) how much television people watch and why; (3) how women are portrayed on television; (4) the consequences of the portrayals of women on television; (5) how television viewing affects cognitive skills and activities; and (6) chapter summary.

The Dearth of Research on Women in Communication

Most research on women and communication involves well-known women and their relationship to historically important issues. Historically, communication research focusing on women can be categorized into studies of: (1) teachers in the speech profession; (2) high profile women in politics; (3) women writers and performers; and (4) high profile members of the women's movement (Foss & Foss, 1983).

With the exception of teachers in the speech profession, communication researchers have studied women with public power or influence. None of these studies included women whose daily and ordinary communication had an impact on professional and home environments (Foss & Foss, 1983). This study will help to fill the gap in the literature by focusing on women who do not have significant public power or influence.

Researchers cite three main reasons why women are largely absent from communication studies. These reasons are based on the work of Campbell (1991), Carlson (1992), and Spitzack and Carter (1987) and include: (1) women's lack of public influence and power; (2) stereotypes about women; and (3) the lack of female-authored articles and studies about women.

Historically, women have lacked public influence and power (Huston et al., 1992; Spitzack & Carter, 1987). Scholarly attention in the area of communication studies is usually focused on those who have achieved individual recognition and who hold powerful positions in society (Spitzack & Carter, 1987). Power is unequally distributed in our society and, in general, men occupy more powerful public positions than women (Oakley, 1981). Thus, using public power and influence as criteria for scholarly interest tends to exclude women from research in general.

Stereotypes about women are a second explanation for why the vast majority of women have not been adequately studied by communication experts (Spitzack & Carter, 1987). Traditionally, society labels women as subjective, noncompetitive and dependent (Spitzack & Carter, 1987). These stereotypes create a double barrier to researching women because femininity is also associated with home, family, support, nurturance, relationship maintenance and procreation (Douglas, 1994; Spitzack & Carter, 1987), areas that have not been deemed worthy of communication research. Femininity is not associated with public arenas such as politics and commerce (Douglas, 1994), which are typically associated with masculinity and which attract research interest (Spitzack & Carter, 1987).

Two additional stereotypic views of women explain why women have not been adequately studied by communication researchers: women are seen as poor communicators; and women do not see themselves as agents of change. Cultural stereotypes define women as poor communicators, thus excluding them from research that requires critical comment (Spitzack & Carter, 1987). For example, stereotypes of female communication characteristics include passivity, politeness, and compliance. Women's communication is labeled "chit-chat," "gossip," or "girl talk" (Spitzack & Carter, 1987). Men, on the other hand, are said to be "making a point," "stating a position," or imparting social knowledge when they communicate (Spitzack & Carter, 1987). Many women do not perceive that they have the power to change their situations (Carlson, 1992). Therefore, the above cultural stereotypes may contribute to women's lack of presence in and contribution to communication studies.

The third explanation for why women have not been adequately studied by communication researchers is that there is a disproportionately low number of female-authored articles about women. Although it appears that more women are authoring articles and studies about women, the process of inclusion has been slow. For example, in a survey of 45 speech anthologies, among thousands of speeches, only 52 were by women (Spitzack & Carter, 1987). Perhaps this situation will change as more women enter the field of communication studies.

This study aids women's quest to see themselves as agents of change and to view themselves as assertive, active, independent, and effective communicators. As more women recognize and utilize their voices and power, more research will emerge that focuses on women and

their experiences. The more research concentrates on women's issues, the more women's lives will be valued.

How Much Television People Watch and Why

The following section reports on the amount of television Americans watch, why they watch television, and what they watch on television. In addition, it will include information about the following viewing populations within the United States: Black Americans, Hispanics and White Americans; the elderly; and men, women, and children. These populations are included in this section because female viewers fit into one or more of these viewing populations with the exception of the male population. How much television American men watch and why will be discussed to demonstrate the viewing differences between males and females. A report of how and why American Indians and Asian Americans watch television is omitted from this overview because little research exits on the use of television among these populations. This section also investigates how socioeconomic issues, such as income and education, influence television viewing.

It is reported that the average daily television viewing time per household in the United States is 7.4 hours and that the average teenager spends an average of 21 hours per week watching television (Bennett, 1994). In addition, some research indicates that 22% to 29% of children's waking hours are spent with television per week (Anderson & Collins, 1988). This figure suggests that children spend approximately the same amount of time with television per week as they do in school. It is

reported that some children watch less television than the average, and others, most often those growing up in poverty, watch much more (Prothrow-Stith & Weissman, 1991).

The literature shows that most Americans have easy access to television. Ninety-eight percent of all households in the United States have television sets and the average household has two television sets. Fifty-eight percent of United States' television households subscribe to cable television and 71% own videocassette recorders (Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1992).

What a person watches on television is determined by a viewer's goals for turning it on, his or her personal interests and the television content available (Huston et al., 1992). People use television to meet different needs. It is believed that people use television as entertainment, as a source of information, as a source for relaxation, socialization, and companionship, and as a time filler (Albarran & Umphrey, 1993; Huston et al., 1992).

It is reported that many people who claim to be regular viewers of television have limited resources and spend a lot of time in their homes. For example, children, retirees, lower income minorities, women who are not employed full-time, and institutionalized people all have more time to watch television if they so choose (Huston et al., 1992).

Another suggested reason why people watch television is that they have nothing better to do with their time. This explanation is known as the Default Hypothesis (Huston et al., 1992). The Default Hypothesis suggests that "watching television is a default activity during times when an individual is at home (or near a television set) and not engaged in activities that conflict with viewing" (Huston et al., 1992, p. 10).

Anderson and Collins (1988) claim that the Default Hypothesis is invalid. Their research suggests that many people, if not most, watch television while engaging in concurrent activities including talking with others, eating, playing games, reading, rough-housing, personal grooming, sleeping, and doing homework. They base this belief on the analyses of time-lapse videotapes placed in American homes to observe television viewing behavior.

Viewing Habits of Specific Populations

Researchers report that different populations within the United States spend different amounts of time with television and have different uses for it. The following section will briefly report on the amount of time spent with television and reasons why the following populations report watching television: Black Americans; Hispanics; White Americans; the elderly; and, men, women and children. Again, it is important to note that a report of why American Indians and Asians Americans watch television is omitted from this overview because little research exits on the use of television among these populations. Perhaps, American Indians and Asian Americans are omitted from the research because they are underrepresented on television; consequently communication researchers may not feel these viewing populations are worthy of research. Also, American Indians may be omitted from communication research because people living on reservations, for example, may have fewer televisions, fewer VCRs, older models of television technology and may not have cable television.

The literature shows that Black Americans are heavy viewers of television. It is reported that Black Americans watch proportionately more television than White Americans (Huston et al., 1992). In addition, the literature shows that Black Americans have a more favorable attitude toward television and are more likely than White Americans to use television as a source of information about buying products (Staples & Jones, 1985). Black Americans are more satisfied with their television viewing (Albarran & Umphrey, 1993) and perceive television as more realistic than White Americans (Staples & Jones, 1985). Asked why they watch, Black Americans, more often than White Americans and Hispanics, report that they watch television because it is entertaining, enjoyable and provides a relief from boredom (Albarran & Umphrey, 1993). Also, it is reported that Black Americans watch game shows, police/detective programs, music programs, sports, dramatic programs, situation comedies, and television movies more frequently than White or Hispanic Americans (Albarran & Umphrey, 1993). Staples and Jones (1985) report that Black Americans rely on television rather than on newspapers or other people for news about the Black community (Staples & Jones, 1985). Finally, Huston et al. (1992) report that well educated Black Americans are particularly heavy television viewers and that Black American adolescents are more likely than White adolescents to use television to learn how to behave with the opposite sex and to develop codes of social conduct.

Staples and Jones (1985) claim that Black American women are the least likely, of all groups, to watch television. Perhaps this is because many Black women work outside the home while serving as primary caretakers of their households and are too busy to watch television.

It is reported that Hispanic Americans, more often than Black and White Americans, watch television to spend time with their families, to learn about themselves, and to relax and to be informed (Albarran & Umphrey, 1993). Also, it is reported that Hispanics, more frequently than Black and White Americans, watch reality programming, talk shows, westerns, soap operas, and news (Albarran & Umphrey, 1993). It is interesting to note that Hispanics report objecting more often to television commercials than Black and White Americans (Albarran & Umphrey, 1993). Perhaps this is true because Hispanics are often underrepresented on television and stereotyped in television commercials (Greenberg, 1986).

It is reported that White Americans claim to watch television because it increases awareness, it is enjoyable, it is entertaining, it helps them to unwind, and to learn new things (Albarran & Umphrey, 1993). Also, it is reported that White Americans most often watch news programs and news magazines, television movies, and situation comedies (Albarran & Umphrey, 1993). It is interesting to note that White Americans report little interest in using television as a family activity (Albarran & Umphrey, 1993).

The literature suggests that the elderly watch more television than any other group in the United States (Huston et al., 1992). Comstock (1978) claims that the elderly depend on television for news, information, entertainment, and companionship. It is reported that the elderly use television to stay involved and to structure their time (Huston et al., 1992). Also, it is reported that television fills gaps for the elderly left by the death of a spouse and the absence of family members who are now immersed in their own lives (Huston et al., 1992). The most popular programs among the elderly are: news, documentaries, and public-affairs programs; soap

operas; situation comedies with sympathetic elderly characters; variety shows; musical specials; travelogues; and quiz shows (Huston et al., 1992).

It is reported that men and women use television differently. Approximately 58% of the television audience is female (Zoglin, 1991) and female viewers outnumber male viewers three to two in all time slots (Gregor, 1993). In addition, women between the ages of 18 to 49 most often watch television in mid-afternoon and during prime-time hours (Comstock, 1978). It is interesting to note that television advertisers' largest market is female viewers between the ages of 18 and 49 because this group is believed to make the most buying decisions in American households (Gregor, 1993). Women in this age group average 31.5 hours of television viewing per week. Men most often view television in the early evenings and during prime-time hours. Men in this age group (18-49) average 24.8 hours of television viewing per week. Older men and women (50 plus) watch more television than younger people (Comstock, 1978).

It is reported that children watch approximately 28 hours of television per week (Prothrow-Stith & Weissman, 1991). Children's viewing habits and their ability to understand what they are watching are influenced by their levels of cognitive and social development. For example, Bredekamp (1987) suggests that six-year-olds are beginning to demonstrate considerable verbal ability and may increasingly understand what they hear on television. Anderson and Collins (1988) report that preschool children tend to remember visual rather than auditory information and can comprehend brief television segments that are age specific. Also, the literature suggests that eight appears to be the age when children can understand cinematic codes commonly used in

television production including changing camera angles, panning, dollying, zooming, and editing (Anderson & Collins, 1988). At this age, children are acquiring the mental ability to solve problems because they can manipulate objects symbolically without touching or moving them (Bredekamp, 1987; Singer & Revenson, 1978).

Although children at the age of eight are beginning to understand cinematic codes, studies indicate that they are unable to understand techniques common in lengthier, adult oriented television programs. These techniques include flashbacks, instant replays, and the use of unfamiliar language, situations, ideas, and actions (Anderson & Collins, 1988). Television programs that might fit into this category include *America's Most Wanted*, *A Current Affair*, *Cops* and MTV. It is reported that by the time children reach the eighth-grade, their cinematic, linguistic and world knowledge is sufficiently developed so that their comprehension of television is comparable to adult levels (Anderson & Collins, 1988).

Children's viewing habits are influenced by their social development. For example, Huston et al. (1992) claim that a six year old's television viewing declines because he or she enters school at this age and spends less time at home. It is reported that children between the ages of 12 to 15 stay up later and are beginning to understand plots and characters in televised comedies and dramas, but watch less television (Huston et al., 1992). Furthermore, older children watch more adult programming, have more independence in their choice of programs, spend more time away from home, and are involved in non-television related activities (Huston et al., 1992). Again, it is worth noting that most households have two televisions (Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1992), a fact which

may promote solitary rather than communal viewing because the second television may be in the child's bedroom.

Throughout childhood, boys watch more television than girls (Desmond et al., 1987; Singer & Singer, 1981). It is reported that boys tend to prefer and pay more attention to programs with animation and high action (Huston et al., 1992; Singer, 1986). It is interesting to note that women watch more television than men but boys watch more television than girls. Perhaps this role reversal occurs because more women than men do not work outside the home and spend more time watching television with their children.

It is reported that low income people watch more television than high income people. Researchers have found that children who are poor, nonwhite, or have low IQs tend to watch action-adventure and adult programming (Singer & Singer, 1986). Children who are brighter, more economically affluent or White are heavy viewers of cartoons and public television children's programming (Singer & Singer, 1986). Highly educated adults watch less television than adults with less formal education (Huston et al., 1992). Again, perhaps the high rates of unemployment and illiteracy among lower income people explain why lower income people rely more heavily on television for news and information than higher income people. Also, if the viewer's urban environment is unsafe, perhaps s/he stays indoors more. And, finally, if viewers can not afford other methods of entertainment and recreation, television viewing may act as a substitute.

The research shows that people use television to meet different needs and that these needs vary according to their age, gender and

ethnicity. In addition, the research shows that other factors, including income and IQ, influence television viewing habits and patterns.

How Women are Portrayed on Television

Given the startling information that female viewers outnumber male viewers three to two in all time slots (Gregor, 1993), what are the consequences for female viewers? What is television communicating to women and how does television viewing affect their daily lives?

The literature indicates that television is communicating negative ideas about women (Burke, 1993; Douglas, 1994). What are the consequences to women of these negative television portrayals? If women accept these messages, are they at risk of developing low self-esteem, being dominated by the status quo, and developing unhealthy and unrealistic attitudes about themselves?

Research indicates that the number of portrayals of men on television, including prime time, daytime, commercial, and children's and public television, is greater than that of females (Huston et al., 1992; Media Report To Women, 1992). For example, males on television outnumber women three to one; males are shown as lead characters three times more often than women on prime-time hours; and the male-to-female ratio is nine to one in commercial voice-overs and two to one in situation comedies (Huston et al., 1992).

Women's portrayals on television are often stereotypical and unrealistic. Women on television are usually younger than television men (Huston et al., 1992). Television women are usually dominated by men, are more likely to need help to solve their problems (Zuckerman et al.,

1980) and are usually overly concerned with their physical appearance (Huston et al., 1992). Women on television are usually shown as homemakers and their marital status is essential to their characters (Zuckerman et al., 1980).

Less than one-third of female television characters work outside their home, while, in reality, 50% of American women are employed outside their homes (Metzger, 1992). Only 29% of the women on television are portrayed as having professional jobs, although in real life there is roughly an equal number of professional men and women (Metzger, 1992). Male television characters appear twice as often as female television characters in public administration positions including law enforcement, courts and national security (Vande Berg & Streckfuss, 1992). Female television characters are shown significantly more often than male television characters in service and retail positions (Vande Berg & Streckfuss, 1992). In addition, female television characters are portrayed significantly more often than male television characters in household occupations and as students (Vande Berg & Streckfuss, 1992). Also, female television characters who are depicted as professional are less likely to hold higher status organizational positions than male television characters (Vande Berg & Streckfuss, 1992). Finally, the organizational behavior of female characters on television is more likely to be presented comedically and less likely to be portrayed as seriously as that of male television characters (Vande Berg & Streckfuss, 1992).

Women on television are more likely to be portrayed as victims of violence than as married and employed women, and are more likely to be portrayed as villains than as full-time homemakers (Waters & Wright, 1991; Zuckerman et al., 1980). Women on television are often shown as

affluent (when they are not in the homemaker role), and are seldom shown experiencing child care problems (Douglas, 1994), sex discrimination, harassment, and poverty (Huston et al., 1992).

Portrayals of Minorities

The portrayal of Black women on television is infrequent (Greenberg, 1986). When Black women are shown, they are often depicted as less achieving, less supportive, more boasting, and more dominant than White females (Greenberg, 1986). In the early 1990s, FOX-TV introduced the first prime-time television program featuring Black women called *Living Single*. *Living Single* is a situation comedy featuring four Black women sharing a New York apartment. Although the four female characters have college degrees and upscale jobs, they are depicted as "man-crazed," and not intelligent (Waters, 1993).

Asian American women are depicted on television in one of two ways. They are either "'docile, submissive, and sexless' or 'exotic, sexy, and diabolical'" (Iiyama & Kitano, 1982, p. 154). In terms of television news reporting, Asian American women appear on-camera more often than do Asian American men (Iiyama & Kitano, 1982). For example, Connie Chung (CBS) is the only Asian American to co-anchor the national evening news. Iiyama and Kitano (1982) claim that Asian women appear more frequently as television journalists than do Asian men because Asian American females are "cute enough to pose no threat" (p. 161) to the status quo. Iiyama and Kitano (1982) claim that the televised message is "that Asians are inferior to [W]hite Americans and that the only way to

become accepted by [W]hite society is for Asians to become passive, dependent, and respectful--that is, to know their place" (p. 162).

American Indian women are underrepresented on television and are depicted as quiet, dull, and hard-working. In general, television depicts the American Indian as "faceless, nameless, and tribeless" (Morris, 1982, p. 189). There is little research on the television portrayals of American Indians.

Stereotyping can also be seen in the depiction of gays and lesbians on television. In the 1960s, male homosexuality on television was associated with mental illness, suicide, and negative stereotypes (Huston et al., 1992). During this time, lesbians were invisible on television, paralleling general trends of female to male ratios on television. In the 1970s, the emergence of the gay rights movement helped to reduce some negative images of homosexuals on television. Today, on the infrequent occasions when television chooses to report on gay issues, it tends to focus on gay men (Schwartz, 1991). Furthermore, when gay men appear on television talk shows, one of the few programs where gay men are seen on television, they are expected to represent both gay and lesbian issues (Schwartz, 1991). It is interesting to note that in 1989 when *Thirtysomething* ran a highly publicized episode portraying two gay men having a conversation in bed, television sponsors immediately withdrew more than $1 million in advertising (Bull, 1991). This reaction represents the ongoing resistance on the part of television advertisers to portray positive images of gays and lesbians on television. The only two reoccurring lesbian characters to appear on television during the last six years have been nurse practitioner Marilyn McGrath on the ABC series *Heartbeat*, which was canceled after being targeted by the religious right (Schwartz, 1991)

and Nancy, Rosanne's friend and employee, on the ABC series *Roseanne*. Research on gays and television is scarce in America.

Elderly and aging women are also underrepresented on television and are often negatively stereotyped (Douglas, 1994). Huston et al. (1992) claim that elderly females are portrayed more negatively than elderly males (Huston et al., 1992). In addition, elderly females appear less frequently on television than elderly men (Huston et al., 1992). An exception is the *Golden Girls*, a situation comedy about four independent, healthy, active, and productive women living together in Florida.

Portrayals of Women in Sports

Stereotyping and gender bias can also be seen in the portrayal of women in sports on television. One area where gender bias is found on television is in sports commentating (Messner et al., 1993). A study conducted by the Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angles found that in tennis and basketball games, female athletes were referred to as "girls," "young ladies," and "women" while male athletes were never referred to as "boys," but as "men," "young men" or "young fellas" (Carlisle-Duncan, 1991). Also, when television commentators referred to the athlete by his/her first name, the athlete was more likely to be female than male, especially in tennis (Carlisle-Duncan, 1991). Television commentators often use the following adjectives to describe athletic events involving male athletes: "aggressive," "big," "brilliant," and "strong," while using words like "choking," "fatigued," "frustrated," and "weary," for female athletes (Carlisle-Duncan, 1991). Adjectives communicating athletic strength were used four times more often than adjectives communicating

athletic weakness to describe male tennis players, while female tennis players were slightly more likely to be described as weak (Carlisle-Duncan, 1991). In addition, when female athletes were described as strong, the following ambivalent language was used: "big girl," "her little jump hook," and "she's tiny, she's small, but so effective" (Carlisle-Duncan, 1991). Lastly, female athletes were more likely to be described as failures due to their lack of aggression, stamina and confidence, and their nervousness and discomfort (Carlisle-Duncan, 1991).

Television News: Coverage of Women's Issues and the Portrayal of Female Journalists

Women's issues are underrepresented on television. Furthermore, women's voices in relation to women's issues are seldom heard on television. For example, ABC's *This Week With David Brinkley* (12/15/91) aired an all-male panel to discuss the William Kennedy Smith rape trial (Extra, 1992). *Court TV* encouraged viewers to "'Watch the Real Life Drama'" as if the rape trial were a made-for-television movie (Devitt, 1992a, p. 10). *Entertainment Tonight* (12/5/91) sensationalized the story by running upbeat music under Bowman's (plaintiff in the case) emotional testimony (Devitt, 1992a), and more recently, television has been sensationalizing the O.J. Simpson murder trial. Lost in much of the television coverage of both stories was a discussion of the prevalence of violence against women in the United States, the commonness of rape, and the low percentage of rapists who are prosecuted for the crime (Devitt, 1992b).

The abortion issue is seldom shown on television. In 1972, Maude, the main character in the series *Maude*, had an abortion which resulted in advertisers withdrawing their commercials from the program (DeMause, 1992). Years later, ABC's series *China Beach* dropped a story line that had the lead character having an abortion because it made her look less "'attractive'" (DeMause, 1992, p. 25). Other television programs have had lead female characters consider abortion, only to choose to have the baby (DeMause, 1992). This trend was seen recently in CBS's series *Murphy Brown* and ABC's series *Sisters*.

During the early eighties, women's roles on prime-time television had become more varied, interesting, and vocationally involved. Several defiant, funny, smart and strong female characters appeared on television (Douglas, 1994). *L.A. Law* depicted female attorneys as tough, competent, and smart. *Cagney & Lacey* featured two female detectives who worked hard, loved and cared for each other, fought for their rights, and struggled to maintain both their personal and professional lives (Douglas, 1994). But, by 1986, prime-time shows revealed a decrease in the number of female characters, an increase in the number of shows that were exclusively male and a return to the role of women as victims in action and detective programs (Huston et al., 1992; Waters & Wright, 1991).

During the late eighties and early nineties, female television journalists began co-hosting local and national newscasts. National newscasts featured female co-anchors including Barbara Walters, Diane Sawyer, Connie Chung, Kathleen Sullivan, Katie Couric, Jane Pauley, Joan Lunden, Paula Zahn, and Charlayne Hunter-Gault. These women only represent a small percentage of American women and they all share similar characteristics--50% are blond and they are all physically attractive

(Douglas, 1994). In addition, several of the female television news co-anchors cited above were replaced by younger and attractive women who were paid significantly less than their predecessors (Faludi, 1991; Southworth, 1991).

Perhaps the most well known example of the replacement of a female television co-anchor is Jane Pauley. In 1989, NBC's Jane Pauley was removed from the co-anchor slot on the *Today Show* and replaced by Deborah Norville, who was blonder and younger. Deborah Norville was later bumped by the youthful model, Katie Couric. It is interesting to note that Pauley's ratings, at the time of her replacement, were higher than those of her male co-host, Bryant Gumbel. In addition, following Pauley's expulsion, the program's ratings dramatically fell below morning cartoon ratings (Faludi, 1991). Also, at CBS, Kathleen Sullivan was removed from the morning news show and replaced by the younger Paula Zahn. According to Faludi (1991), the network felt that Zahn was "a more comely and upstanding model of true womanhood than the divorced Sullivan" (p. 373).

Another well known example of the replacement of a female television co-anchor is Christine Craft. In 1981, Craft was removed from the co-anchor slot on the evening news at KMBC, an ABC affiliate in Kansas City. She was removed from the position because the station claimed that she was too old, too unattractive and not sufficiently deferential to men (Craft, 1988). Craft sued Metromedia (the owner of KMBC) and after four years of litigation she lost the case. Ironically, Craft was replaced by Brenda Williams, a Black women who was approximately the same age as Craft and who later sued Metromedia for sexual discrimination (Craft, 1988).

During the late eighties and early nineties, female "experts" seldom appeared on the nightly news unless they were being interviewed about abortion, child care or affirmative action; when the topics included war, foreign policy, or the environment, women's voices were seldom heard on television (Douglas, 1994). In 1988, only 10.3 % of the guests on *Nightline* were female, and of the 20 most frequent guests, none were women (Douglas, 1994). In 1990, the ten individuals who appeared most frequently as analysts on the ABC, CBS, and NBC nightly news were all men (Douglas, 1994). In 1989, only 15 % of news correspondents on television were female and of the 100 most frequently seen correspondents on television, only eight were women (Douglas, 1994; Southworth, 1991).

It is reported that women fared better on PBS's *MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour*, serving as correspondents in 40% of the news stories (Southworth, 1991). However, Women Are Good News, a women's advocate group, has criticized PBS for featuring less than 15% of women on public affairs programs including *McLaughlin* and *MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour* (Pogrebin, 1992).

Female viewing audiences are being bombarded by these worsening images of women on television. This fact is important because the literature shows that many viewers, especially working class women, believe that television presents them with a realistic image of the world (Greenberg, 1986; Press, 1991; Staples & Jones, 1985). Thus, the questions raised by the negative portrayals of women on television are numerous and critical.

The Consequences of the Portrayal of Women on Television

The following section will report on the consequences of the portrayals of women on television. In order to provide clarity for the reader, the section is divided into two categories: (1) Social learning: Attitudes and beliefs, and (2) Social learning: Emotions and behaviors.

Social Learning: Attitudes and Beliefs

It is reported that television viewing has been linked to the formation and maintenance of stereotypes about sex roles, sexual orientation and self-esteem. Seidman (1992) reports that sex-role stereotyping commonly found in music videos reinforces sex-role beliefs. Comstock (1989) found that heavy television viewers are more likely to have stronger beliefs in favor of traditional sex-role stereotypes.

This finding is also supported by research on children. Morgan (1982) reports that children who watch a lot of television stereotyped others according to gender more frequently than those children who read a lot. In addition, Morgan (1982) reports that elementary school children (third through fifth grade) who watch more television than their classmates are more likely to stereotype both gender related activities and gender related qualities.

The literature demonstrates that television viewing influences female viewers' attitudes and beliefs about gender stereotypes more strongly than it influences male viewers' beliefs and attitudes. This conclusion is based on the work of Comstock (1989), Gerbner et al. (1986), Huston et al. (1992), Morgan (1982), and Zuckerman et al. (1980).

Zuckerman et al. (1980) found that third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade boys' gender prejudices were unrelated to television viewing and demographic background, whereas girls' prejudices against their own gender tended to be strongly related to television viewing and their demographic backgrounds. For the girls, greater prejudice against their own gender was "predicted by the child's lower IQ, mother's higher educational attainment, and the child's viewing more television programs" (p. 287). Furthermore, the girls who believed that females are less competent than males tended "to have lower IQs, more highly educated mothers, and watch more game shows and variety programs" (p. 287). The girls who believed that males are less obedient than females tended "to have fathers who watch more violent TV programs, and the girls themselves watch more fantasy violent programs, fewer of the extremely sex stereotypic programs, and fewer nonfantasy violent programs" (p. 287).

Morgan (1982) found that for sixth- through tenth-grade boys, television viewing seemed to have little impact on later sexism, whereas for girls the amount of television viewing predicted sexism scores a year later. The girls who were most likely to show evidence of sex-role stereotypes had medium and high socioeconomic status rather than lower socioeconomic status.

Perhaps these findings can be explained by the fact that game shows, variety programs, fantasy violent, and violent programming depict females more stereotypically than males. The link between lower IQ scores and prejudice against their own gender was not surprising because one would expect young girls who are categorized as less competent by others to view females in general as less competent. The finding that a

mother's higher educational attainment is linked to a girl's prejudice against her own gender is surprising, however. One would expect girls with high-achieving mothers to hold fewer gender role stereotypes than their peers.

The Cultivation Hypothesis and the Drip Model may explain how television influences viewers' attitudes and gender stereotypes, especially among female viewers. The Cultivation Hypothesis maintains "that the more time people spend watching television, the more likely they are to perceive the real world in ways that reflect the patterns found in television drama" (Morgan, 1982, p. 948). In other words, the more people are exposed to television, the greater number of stereotyped messages they are likely to receive. This hypothesis is also known as the Drip Model. The Drip Model suggests that repetitious messages and images (commonly seen and heard on television) gradually shape expectations and beliefs about the real world (Huston et al., 1992).

The "Mainstreaming" theory (Gerbner et al., 1986) may explain the difference in sexism between boys and girls and the observed differences among the girls from different socioeconomic backgrounds found by Morgan and Zuckerman et al. The "Mainstreaming" theory suggests:

> that differences deriving from influences other than television may be reduced among heavy viewers. In effect, it suggests that television constitutes a stable, broadly shared cultural mainstream; cumulative, heavy exposure should cultivate a homogenization of outlooks among otherwise divergent groups (Morgan, 1982, p. 948).

Morgan (1982) suggests that although boys show a greater decrease in sexism scores over time, their scores are significantly higher than the girls' scores over time. Girls tend to be less sexist than boys unless they are

heavy television viewers. Because women's portrayals on television are often stereotypical and unrealistic, girls who are heavy viewers may adopt these negative views about women.

In addition, Morgan suggests that mainstreaming is evident in the observed differences among the girls from different social classes. He suggests that no effects are apparent for the lower socioeconomic girls because their opinions are already consistent with television images.

On the positive side, the literature indicates that when television is used correctly (age appropriately), it can change gender and racial stereotypes (Huston et al., 1992; Johnston & Ettema, 1986). Unfortunately, the majority of these programs are targeted at a small percentage of the American viewing audience. For example, public television programs such as *Freestyle* and *Sesame Street* are designed to reduce sex-role stereotypes and racist attitudes among children. Unfortunately, these kinds of television programs are not regularly seen by the teenagers or adults who could benefit from their content. In addition, adult television entertainment, viewed by the majority of audiences, is not designed to reduce gender and racial stereotypes.

The Recognition and Respect Theories are worth mentioning because these theories may further explain the relationship between television viewing and female viewers' attitudes and beliefs about gender stereotypes. It is suggested that people who regularly appear on television symbolize power and importance within our society (Huston et al., 1992). In addition, the legitimacy of people who frequently appear on television is maintained through the processes of recognition and respect (Huston et al., 1992). Recognition occurs "when an individual identifies the existence of another by paying attention or taking that person into

account. In the mass media, recognition of social groups occurs when they appear in [television] programs" (Huston et al., 1992, p. 21). Respect is "conferred when people identify with others by sharing their definitions of behavior, their assessments of behavior, and their explanations of behavior" (Huston et al., 1992, p. 21). Because men outnumber women on television, the Recognition and Respect Theories may play a significant role in shaping female viewers' beliefs, attitudes, emotions, and behaviors.

Many important questions are raised in this section: What are the consequences of these negative portrayals of women on television? If women accept these messages, are they at risk of developing low self-esteem, being dominated by the status quo, and developing unhealthy and unrealistic attitudes about themselves? Furthermore, the findings that show a positive relationship between television viewing and gender stereotyping have important implications for women's lives.

Social Learning: Emotions and Behaviors

The literature reports that television viewing influences viewers' emotions and behaviors (Comstock, 1989; Prothrow-Stith & Weissman, 1991; Singer, 1985; Singer, 1983; Singer et al., 1988; Singer & Singer, 1984). As Huston et al. (1992) concluded:

> Because television programming contains abundant information about affect, viewers may learn to recognize emotional displays, acquire beliefs about how often people experience different emotions, understand that certain situations are associated with certain affective states, accept social expectations regarding emotional expression and behavior, and come to believe in certain models of emotional responsiveness, experience, expression, and behavior (p. 43).

It is reported that emotion and behavior are linked to the selection of television programming. Emotions and behavior mentioned by researchers include happiness, interest, involvement, excitement, surprise, joy, sadness, anger, disgust, and fear (Huston et al., 1992). Also, aggression (Comstock, 1980; Singer & Singer, 1986; Singer, 1985); caring, sharing, cooperation, and adopting of health habits (Singer & Singer, 1984) are emotions and behaviors linked to the selection of television programming. For example, researchers have found that when given the choice, bored adults choose to watch exciting television programs, stressed viewers choose to watch relaxing television programs and highly stressed subjects avoided television altogether (Huston et al., 1992).

In addition, the literature demonstrates that the development of certain emotions and behaviors is linked to watching specific types of television programming. It is reported that anger occurs more frequently when watching situation comedies and fear is linked to watching mystery and suspense programming (Huston et al., 1992). In addition, it is reported that fear is linked to watching television news and fictional programming (Gerbner, et al., 1986; Waters & Wright, 1991). Interest and excitement are linked to viewing children's programming, mystery and suspense series; and joy is linked to watching children's educational programming and drama (Huston et al., 1992). As to sexual conduct, a 1987 Louis Harris poll found that two-thirds of American adults surveyed believed that television encourages teenagers to be sexually active (Huston et al., 1992). Approximately two-thirds of a sample of eighth-, tenth-, and twelfth-graders said that they use television as one source of information about sex (Huston et al., 1992).

The Observational Learning Theory is important in relation to television viewing and behavior. This theory suggests that "a good deal of learning occurs through vicarious rather than personal experience: We observe the behavior of others, observe the consequences, and later we may imitate their behavior" (Mazur, 1990, p. 269). Most of the research regarding the Observational Learning Theory, in relation to television viewing, shows a positive link between television violence and aggressive behavior (Prothrow-Stith & Weissman, 1991; Singer, 1985; Singer & Singer, 1986; Singer & Singer, 1984). This finding is not surprising because much of television content is violent (Gable, 1993; Prothrow-Stith & Weissman, 1991). Furthermore, it is reported that reward plays a significant role in the relationship between imitated behavior and television viewing (Singer, 1985). In other words, television characters who are rewarded for their behavior are more likely to be imitated by viewers than television characters who are not rewarded for their behavior.

Although most of the research on the Observational Learning Theory is based on children and their television viewing, the theory is also relevant to adult female television viewers. If aggressive behavior is positively linked to viewing television violence, does this suggest that female viewers, especially young girls, will imitate or model the often negative and unrealistic portrayals of women on television? Or, do these findings suggest that adult male viewers might imitate the violence against women commonly found in made for television movies (Waters & Wright, 1991)? The Observational Learning Theory raises important questions in relation to women's lives and television viewing.

Why do television viewers imitate and model the behavior they see and hear on television? There are several theoretical models that serve as

explanations for why viewers may imitate television portrayals, including: the Identification Model, the Normative Model, and the Pleasure Principle.

The Identification Model suggests that when television viewers identify with the character, they are more likely to experience a portrayal as instructive (Comstock, 1989). Furthermore, Comstock (1989) suggests that "television entertainment is particularly likely to function as instruction when persons portrayed are perceived by viewers as somehow similar to themselves-a circumstance certainly achieved at many points in television drama" (p. 190).

On one hand, modeling behavior can have positive consequences for viewers if the behavior being modeled is prosocial. On the other hand, modeling the often unrealistic and negative female portrayals commonly seen on television can have negative consequences for female viewers. Modeling behavior can have the same unfavorable effect on male viewers who identify with the negative ideas that television often communicates about women (Burke, 1993; Douglas, 1994).

The Normative Model serves as an additional explanation for why viewers may mimic the behavior they see and hear on television. The Normative Model suggests that viewers may think that behavior seen on television, such as the victimization of women, is normal because violence against women regularly appears in television news and made for television movies (Waters & Wright, 1991; Zoglin, 1991). Singer and Singer (1984) suggest that "If most dilemmas faced by people on television are dealt with by violent acts then one can assume that such behaviors (rather than discussion or negotiation) are the usual methods of our society for handling conflicts" (p. 32). It is important to note that Singer

and Singer are referring to children in the previous statement; however, the same reasoning can be applied to adult viewers. What are the consequences for female and male viewers who believe that the often negative depiction and victimization of women on television are normal?

The last model that serves as an explanation for why television viewers imitate television portrayals is the Pleasure Principle. The Pleasure Principle indicates that viewers are more likely to be influenced by television portrayals that please them (Comstock, 1989). It is reported that children imitated characters they liked more often than those they did not care for (Comstock, 1989). Also, it was found that children behaved more aggressively when expressing pleasure rather than dislike over the violent portrayals they have seen on television (Comstock, 1989).

It appears that viewers who identify with and like television characters and who feel that they possess similar characteristics as the television character are more likely to imitate their behavior. In addition, when television behaviors are viewed as "normal," viewers are more likely to imitate those behaviors. If these findings are true, what are the consequences for young female viewers? On one hand, the consequences can be positive if female viewers model prosocial behaviors on television. On the other hand, who is to determine what is prosocial? Are unrealistic images of female models who regularly appear in television commercials prosocial? Is the unrealistic and comical portrayal of Murphy Brown, an unwed, single mother who seldom experiences child care problems or sexual discrimination, prosocial? These issues raise important questions in relation to women and television viewing.

It is reported that all television viewers, regardless of age, are at risk of dangerous consequences from watching unrealistic television

portrayals. Researchers have found that adults who are heavy television viewers are prone to adopting a view of the world that reflects the violence found on television news and fictional programs (Gerbner et al., 1986). George Gerbner calls this phenomenon the "Mean-World Syndrome" (Waters & Wright, 1991).

Numerous studies in the 1980s found a positive correlation between television viewing (especially of aggressive content) and a belief in a hostile and scary world (Singer 1985; Singer & Singer, 1986; Singer & Singer, 1984). Waters and Wright (1991) report that heavy viewers of television violence exhibit an exaggerated mistrust of strangers and overestimate the odds of being victimized in their lives. Prothrow-Stith and Weissman (1991) illustrate why television viewers may be prone to adopting a view of the world that reflects the violence found on television news. They offer the example of a real-life act of violence that shocked viewers in 1989 as the story unfolded in the news:

> Nor were television viewers . . . protected from the blood-splattered picture of a young pregnant Bostonian who had been shot in the head in the most widely publicized crime story of 1989. The victim was Carol Stuart. Her husband, Charles Stuart, was shot in the stomach. He told police that a black man had forced his way into the couple's car and shot them both during a robbery. For weeks the story of Carol Stuart's murder was headline news all over the country. The coverage shared a single theme. Story after story told the white, middle class that it was now threatened by the violence consuming the black community. The angle turned out to be a gross distortion. Carol Stuart was not killed by a black male. She was killed, as the vast majority of white female homicide victims are, by her husband. In December, Charles Stuart committed suicide after his brother implicated him in his wife's murder. His stomach wound, police now believe, was self-inflicted (p. 33).

Although the Carol Stuart murder was tragic, the news coverage that focused on a Black suspect distorted reality. "The likelihood of a white woman in Massachusetts being shot to death by a black man she did not know is one in four million. That's the same risk a white woman runs of being hit by lightning" (Prothrow-Stith & Weissman, 1991, p. 33). It is reported that the "likelihood of a television character falling victim to violence is about 50 times greater than the probability for the average American adult" (Comstock, 1989, p. 173).

Another concern that researchers express about the relationship between viewers' emotions and television content is that television often blurs fact and fiction. The blurring of fact and fiction can be regularly seen in television tabloids such as *A Current Affair, Hard Copy, Unsolved Mysteries* and *America's Most Wanted,*. Prothrow-Stith and Weissman (1991) illustrate how television blurs fact and fiction by ignoring the consequences of real-life violence. They state:

> The mass media lie about the physical and the emotional realities of violence. As a graduate of the emergency room I know better than most that in real life, mashed and mangled bodies are not attractive. Neither is the emotional pain that violence causes . . . On film or videotape violence begins and ends in a moment. 'Bang bang, you're dead.' Then the death is over. This sense of action-without-consequence replicates and reinforces the dangerous 'magical' way many children think. Do the 12- and 14-year-olds who are shooting each other to death in Los Angles, Chicago, Washington, D.C. really understand that death is permanent, unalterable, final, tragic? Television certainly is not telling them so (p. 34).

Prothrow-Stith and Weissman (1991) further explain how television merges reality and fantasy:

> . . . much of what we see in the mass media merges sex and violence. Television dramas depicting lurid crimes committed against children and young women are as common as cowboy stories were a few decades ago. Slow motion reenactments of real life crimes of passion are the specialty of a whole new genre of television programs that some refer to as 'tabloid television' or 'trash T.V.' *A Current Affair*, *America's Most Wanted*, *Unsolved Mysteries*- all of these programs recreate gory detail real life crimes, often of a sexual nature . . . [t]hese series, which blithely merge reality and fantasy, play to the inability of viewers, especially young viewers, to discriminate between what is true and what is untrue (p. 34).

On the positive side, it is reported that the relationship between emotions and behavior and television is not all negative. Many studies point to television's potential for producing positive benefits. Many television programs (both commercial and educational) are designed to promote prosocial emotions and behaviors. Some of these programs include: *Mister Rogers's Neighborhood* and *Sesame Street*, designed to help preschool children cope with and better understand feelings of anger, disappointment, or fear, conflict, new situations, and the death of loved ones (Johnston & Ettema, 1986; Palmer, 1988); *ABC After School Specials*, designed to show how children and teenagers struggle with conflicts; *3-2-1 Contact*, aimed at 9- to 12- year olds and designed to change stereotypes about scientists and promote science; *Fat Albert*, a children's series designed to promote prosocial attitudes and behavior; and, *Freestyle*, a series designed to reduce sex-stereotyped career interests. All of these programs have changed children's attitudes and stereotypes about sex roles (Comstock, 1989). All of the above examples include modeling techniques showing characters exhibiting positive behavior.

Unfortunately, these programs are targeted at a small percentage of the American viewing audience and these kinds of television programs

are not regularly seen by the teenagers or adults who could benefit from their content. In addition, adult television entertainment, viewed by the majority of audiences, is not designed to promote positive emotions and behaviors. With the exception of the *Cosby Show*, there does not appear to be any program specifically designed to change adult stereotypes. It is interesting to note that Bill Cosby received a doctorate in education. He specifically studied how to create prosocial television programming.

How Television Viewing Affects Cognitive Skills and Activities

The research claims that cognitive skills and activities, for the most part, are not negatively affected by television viewing. There is little evidence that suggests television viewing displaces valuable cognitive activities (Anderson & Collins, 1988; Houston et al., 1991). Only minor displacement of homework and reading is reported (Anderson & Collins, 1988). While there is some evidence that television viewing may be displacing homework among high school students, the amount of reported displacement is small (Anderson & Collins, 1988). It is reported that homework is often timeshared with, rather than displaced by, television viewing (Anderson & Collins, 1988; Huston et al., 1992).

It appears that as viewers, especially children, become familiar with cinematic codes commonly found on television, they can process what they see more thoroughly and learn from it (Huston et al., 1992). There are four ways in which cinematic codes can aid the understanding of program content. These include the following: (1) focusing attention on central and relevant ideas; (2) signaling the type of content being presented; (3) carrying connotative meanings that enhance and clarify

relevant information; and, (4) encouraging viewer participation and activity. It appears that programs specifically designed to teach children cognitive and social skills more often incorporate these cinematic codes into their programs than adult entertainment programming. Perhaps the people who develop prime-time programming should be alerted to the educational value of cinematic codes.

On the negative side, restlessness, inability to persevere, and intolerance of delay are associated with viewing action-adventure television and aggressive violent fantasy programs, although the association is small (Singer et al., 1984). It is important to note that this finding was found among children. Also, it is reported that children whose parents do not set viewing limits and whose mothers watch a lot of television show poorer comprehension of television plots and show greater confusion distinguishing between fact and fantasy. They also tend to be more restless and aggressive, and demonstrate poorer acquisition of general knowledge.

It is suggested that television viewing contributes to imaginative abilities but that the contribution is small. An alternative belief is that television provides a common culture for viewers, thereby reducing original and diverse ideas. A second belief is that a viewer's inclination to engage in other cognitive activities may be reduced (displacement hypothesis) because of television viewing; consequently, the viewer's, especially children's, knowledge base and experience become limited (Anderson & Collins, 1988).

A third belief is that television viewing is not a passive activity (Morley, 1986). Buckingham states that "Audiences are not passive victims of scheduling decisions, and they do discriminate, often in very

discerning ways, between different examples of the same genre" (1987, reported in Hart, 1991). It is reported that specially designed children's programs such as *Mister Roger's Neighborhood* are frequently credited for increasing imagination and creativity among its viewers (Anderson & Collins, 1988). Again, these kinds of television programs are not regularly seen by the teenagers or adults who could benefit from their content. In addition, adult television entertainment, viewed by the majority of audiences, is not designed to promote imagination and creativity.

Lastly, Anderson and Collins (1988) claim that while viewers (especially children) pay attention to television while viewing, the level of mental activity is low. Their finding corresponds with viewers' claims that television viewing is a relatively undemanding activity. Furthermore, viewers rate themselves as expending low levels of mental effort in cognitively processing information on television (Anderson & Collins, 1988). Perhaps this effect can be attributed to the rapid pace of television, which often does not allow enough time for inference, reflection, and mental absorption.

Chapter Summary

Most of the research that focuses on women and communication involves well known women and their relationship to historically important issues. None of these studies included women whose daily and ordinary communication had an impact on professional and home environments. The literature suggests that the reasons why many women are absent from communication studies include: (1) women's lack of public influence and power; (2) stereotypes of women's characteristics and

primary associations which have not been deemed worthy of research; and, (3) the fact that women are seen as poor communicators and do not see themselves as agents of change. Although it appears that more women are authoring articles and studies about women, the process of inclusion has been slow. The literature demonstrates that there is a need for more communication research that focuses on women and their experiences. As more research concentrates on women's issues, women's lives will be valued more highly.

One area of women's lives that infrequently appears in the literature is their relationship with television. What does television communicate to women? What meaning do they create from their television viewing experience? Television is designed to sell products and ideas to viewers, especially female viewers. Among these products and ideas are soap, mouthwash, cars, beer, fashion, lifestyles, attitudes, and socially acceptable behavior. More importantly, television sells viewing audiences to advertisers. It may be unfair, then, to assess television, a medium not designed to teach, from a cognitive perspective.

On the other hand, investigating the educational impact of television among female viewers is an important and necessary educational endeavor because television viewing is so pervasive. Furthermore, it is demonstrated that viewers, especially children, learn through imitating and modeling television characters. So, what is television teaching female viewers? The research indicates that cognitive skills and activities, for the most part, are not negatively affected by television viewing but that social skills are both positively and negatively influenced by television viewing.

The findings that television viewing is linked to the formation and maintenance of attitudes and beliefs, especially sex-role stereotypes, are important from an educational standpoint. The most interesting finding reveals that television viewing and demographic backgrounds negatively influence girls', rather than boys', prejudice against their own gender. Girls' prejudice against their own gender is predicted by greater television viewing, lower IQ, and higher educational attainment by their mothers. Furthermore, the girls who are most likely to show evidence of sex-role stereotypes are girls of medium and high socioeconomic backgrounds rather than girls of lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

The Mainstreaming Theory may explain why girls who claim to be heavy television viewers tend to be more prejudiced against their own gender than non-heavy viewers. The Mainstreaming Theory suggests that no effects are apparent for the lower socioeconomic girls because their opinions may be already consistent with television images. As Morgan (1982) points out, girls as a group, and particularly those girls who are less likely to hold gender role stereotypes, are at greater risk for being influenced by television gender roles.

These finding are disturbing because the research shows that television is communicating negative ideas about women. In addition, it is demonstrated that viewers' social learning is affected by the content watched on television. What are the long-term consequences of the negative portrayals of women on television? If young women are not looking toward more positive role models, they may be at risk of having low self-esteem, being dominated by the status quo, and developing an unhealthy and unrealistic attitude about themselves. What are the

consequences if television is the only source that young women turn to for positive role models and mentors?

On the positive side, it is demonstrated that television, when it is used correctly (age appropriately), can change gender and racial stereotypes. Unfortunately, the majority of these programs are targeted at a small percentage of the American viewing audience, namely children. These children's programs are seldom seen by teenagers or adults who could benefit from their content. In addition, adult television entertainment, viewed by the majority of audiences, is not designed to reduce gender and racial stereotypes.

On the other hand, who decides what gender and racial television portrayals are morally correct? Does the Moral Majority want to maintain sex-role and racist stereotypes? If so, what are the educational implications? And, what can be done to change the situation?

Perhaps the most widely researched topic on the educational impact of television includes its relationship with aggression and the question of whether viewers adopt a view of the world that reflects the violence found on television news and fictional programs. Numerous studies have shown that viewing violent programming can lead to aggressive behavior and a view that the world is dangerous and "scary." Television programs associated with aggression are action-adventure programming, super hero cartoons, television tabloids and television news. Again, this relationship is attributed to observational learning (Mazur, 1990).

Some researchers believe that violence on television is increasing. In reviewing a week's worth of prime-time programming (94 programs) on ABC, CBS, NBC, and FOX, it was found that 57 killings, 99 assaults, 29

car wrecks, and 22 accounts of child abuse were shown (Hanson & Knopes, 1993).

In a recent study, Gerbner (1993) found that violence on television during prime-time hours has decreased on both ABC and CBS since the 1991 season. The study also found that NBC was the most violent network for the 1992-1993 season to date. Gerbner, however, indicates that the overall difference between the networks is insignificant. He states, "'If you look at the 20-year average, there is no significant difference between the networks" (Gable, 1993, p. D3).

The research indicates that cognitive skills and activities, for the most part, are not negatively affected by television viewing. There is little evidence that suggests television viewing displaces valuable cognitive activities. While there is some evidence that television viewing may be displacing homework among high school students, the amount of reported displacement is small. Perhaps teachers are giving less homework. This subject needs further investigation.

It appears that as viewers, especially children, become familiar with cinematic codes commonly found on television, they can process what they see more thoroughly and learn from it. There are four ways cinematic codes can aid the understanding of program content. These include the following: (1) focusing attention on central and relevant ideas; (2) signaling the type of content being presented; (3) carrying connotative meanings that enhance and clarify relevant information; and, (4) encouraging viewer participation and activity. It appears that programs specifically designed to teach children cognitive and social skills more often incorporate these cinematic codes into their programs than adult

entertainment programming. Perhaps, prime-time programmers should be alerted to the educational value of cinematic codes.

On the negative side, restlessness, inability to persevere, and intolerance of delay are associated with television viewing among children, although the association is small. It is suggested that television viewing contributes to imaginative abilities but that the contribution is small. Again, specially designed children's programs are frequently credited for increasing imagination and creativity among their viewers. These programs are seldom watched by teenagers and adults who could benefit from their content.

The research clearly shows that repetitious messages and images, commonly seen and heard on television, can affect specific cognitive skills and activities, gradually shape expectations and beliefs about the real world, and influence behavior and emotions. The question remains: What are the consequences for female viewers who have spent a large portion of their lives watching negative images of women on television?

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The following chapter outlines the plan for conducting this study on the meaning college women make from their television viewing experiences. This research plan included: (1) conducting a series of three in-depth phenomenological interviews with 12 female college students and (2) gathering demographic information on the participants using a questionnaire. A total of 12 female college students participated in the study. This sample included six women ages 18-23 and six women ages 30-45. All interviews were audio taped and later transcribed. During data analysis, I examined the 1,443 pages of material for common themes and patterns.

Sections of this chapter include: (1) the in-depth phenomenological interviewing process; (2) the rationale for using the phenomenological in-depth interviewing method; (3) the demographic questionnaire; (4) selection of participants; (5) time frame for collecting the data; (6) participant drop-out rate; (7) protection for the participant; (8) analysis of the data; and (9) chapter summary.

The In-depth Phenomenological Interviewing Process

I used the technique of phenomenological in-depth interviewing described by I. E. Seidman in his book, Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences (1991) to collect first-hand information on college women's experiences with television viewing. The purpose of phenomenological in-depth

interviewing is not to answer preconceived questions, nor to evaluate and test hypotheses, but rather to understand the experiences of other people and the meaning they create from their experiences (Seidman, 1991).

There are four strengths to phenomenological in-depth interviewing: (1) it is an effective way to gain knowledge through understanding the experience of other people's lives; (2) it takes advantage of the ability to construct meaning through language; (3) it stresses the importance of the individual and how she sees herself in relation to other people, places and things; and (4) it provides satisfaction for the researcher who was interested in others' personal stories (Seidman, 1991).

The structure for phenomenological in-depth interviewing is based on a series of three interviews. This technique was designed by Schuman (1982; reported in Seidman, 1991) and adapted by Seidman (1991):

> The first interview establishes the context of the participants' experience. The second allows participants to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context in which it occurs. And the third encourages the participants to reflect on the meaning their experience holds for them (p. 11).

In this study, each interview acted as a springboard for the next interview. I spaced each interview approximately one week apart, taking into consideration each participant's schedule. This allowed me, as well as the participant, enough time to reflect upon the previous interview. The interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed by a reputable transcriber. I listened to each earlier interview prior to conducting the next interview.

In the first interview, I asked the participant to tell me as much as possible about her experience with television viewing up until the time she became a college student. I paid particular attention to gender-related issues. I encouraged the participant to reconstruct her past television viewing experiences going as far back as possible. This first interview lasted 90 minutes.

In the second interview, I asked the participant to tell me as much as possible about her present experience with television viewing. I paid particular attention to gender related issues. I asked her to concentrate on the details of her present experience. The second interview lasted 90 minutes.

In the third interview, I asked the participant to reflect on the meaning of her television viewing experience drawing from her first and second interviews. My questions included, "Given what you have said about your television viewing before you became a college student and given what you have said about your present television viewing, what sense does it make to you?" The third interview lasted 90 minutes.

It is important to note that I was asking participants to think about things they may not have been conscious of before the interview or that they may have not wanted to know. These issues may have included the amount of television they watched per week or the reasons why they claimed to watch television. In other words, I was asking them to make visible what normally is invisible (Miller, 1992). To make visible what is normally invisible may have created tension during the interview process. Participants may not have wanted to rediscover and disclose what they had suppressed during their lifetimes. For example, asking a participant to talk about a television experience that involved family viewing may

have reminded them of a deceased relative and; consequently, evoked unexpected emotions. These feelings may have affected a participant's willingness to be honest and forthright during the interviews. However, I felt confident that the method of phenomenological in-depth interviewing described by Seidman (1991) provided an encouraging, respectful and "safe" environment in which the participant could create meaning from potentially emotional and stressful experiences. Also, being a women, my presence during the interviews may have helped create a comfortable environment for the participant. I tried to recognize any feelings of resistance on the part of a participant, and made every effort to respect her feelings.

The Rationale for the Phenomenological In-depth Interviewing Method

One important reason I chose phenomenological in-depth interviewing as a methodology was that it is designed to encourage more equity between the researcher and the participant than quantitative methodologies. This is not to say that an interviewer and participant relationship is equal. On the contrary, the interviewer and the participant come to the interview for different reasons and get different things out of the interview. Because the researcher initiated the interview process, it may appear that she has greater control over it. It was my responsibility to be aware of this hierarchical arrangement and strive to reduce the imbalance of the interview process.

I took the following actions, based on the advice of Seidman (1991), to ensure as much equity as possible in the interview relationship: (1) I consciously pursued the stories of people who are usually unheard; (2) I

set realistic goals and achieved those goals; (3) I was explicit about the purpose and process of the research; (4) I used a consent form that clearly explained the rights and responsibilities of the participant; (5) I scheduled convenient and reasonable times and locations for the interviews; (6) I valued and respected the words of the participant; and (7) I reported the participants' experiences fairly and with respect and dignity (p. 83-84).

Another reason I used the in-depth interviewing qualitative research method is that I believe that other more traditional methods for quantitative research are inadequate for this kind of research involving women (Spitzack & Carter, 1987). There is a need for new research methods for studying women because studies that focus on understanding women's experiences are difficult to conduct if the data collector can not communicate with the participant with some degree of reciprocity. For example, Oakley (1981) conducted a study investigating women's experiences of being pregnant and giving birth. The process of giving birth is an intensely personal experience and may be difficult to communicate and share with a "neutral" data collector, especially if the data collector could not or opted not to interact with the participant. In this case, it might be difficult for a male to conduct the research because the participant is aware that the data collector has never experienced giving birth. If the data collector were a female in this case, the participant would not know whether or not she has experienced giving birth and might assume that she has. Many studies that focus on women's experiences stress the importance of researcher and participant communication and reciprocity. In this study, it was important for the data collector to stress communication and reciprocity with the

participants because she was asking them to share personal experiences about a medium that does not always positively depict their gender.

Also, many studies that focus on women's experiences stress the importance of allowing the participant rather than the data collector to lead the direction of the interview. This is important for two reasons: (1) it minimizes the effects of the interviewer's biases, and, (2) it creates an opportunity for women's voices to be heard. By allowing women to participate fully and use their voices, one can expect a high degree of richness, complexity, and participant involvement (Spitzack & Carter, 1987).

The second reason why there is a need for new research methods in relationship to women's experiences is the assumption that research methods are gender neutral. Many experts believe this assumption is false. "The logic that informs dominant world views assumes a basis in neutrality, providing claims of *human* truths which, in fact, reflect the interests and predispositions of privileged groups--namely men" (Spitzack & Carter, 1987, p. 403). A recent literature review showed that most communication research is conducted and interpreted by males. In general, women are excluded from this process. Can male researchers fairly interpret research based on women's experiences? Males and females behave differently and similar communication behaviors are unlikely. For example, women are described by some researchers as being the more talkative sex and as commonly wanting to relate to other people and to assume relationships that require conversation (it is ironic that women are viewed as poor communicators), while men are not described this way (Schloff & Yudkin, 1993). Therefore, standardized research methods should not be universally applied. Phenomenological in-depth

interviewing provided tools that (1) allowed for reciprocity in the communication between participant and researcher, and (2) allowed the participant rather than the data collector to lead the direction of the interview.

Women have a responsibility to explore and describe life from the position that they occupy so that women's experiences will have value for women, thus encouraging them to examine their own lives. Also, men who will not adequately understand women's experiences unless they are informed (Spender, 1982). This study helped fill the need for more studies using in-depth phenomenological methods in relationship to women's experiences.

Another reason I chose phenomenological in-depth interviewing was because a literature review showed me that women's voices were not adequately studied and were too often not heard throughout the literature (Spitzack & Carter, 1987). One reason women's voices have not been adequately heard throughout past research is that women, from a young age, are encouraged to be "without voice" (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). For example, Brown and Gilligan (1992), through their research on girls' journey into womanhood, found the following:

> Voices became key insofar as girls feel pressure to become selfless or without voice in relationships, and the experience of self in the sense of having a voice became central to girl's experience of authentic relationship . . . Listening to girls' voices, we heard the degree to which morality, in a male-voiced culture and male-governed society, justifies certain psychologically debilitating moves which girls and women are encouraged to make in relationships and creates internal as well as external barriers to girls' ability to speak in relationships and move freely in the world (pp. 20-21).

There is a need to provide more opportunities for research that focuses on women's voices and the subjective understanding of their experiences. I chose phenomenological in-depth interviewing because the method is based on spoken language. Spoken language is recognized through voice, and voice is central to our way of knowing and making meaning from our experiences (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). Also, voice makes heard what may normally not be heard (Brown & Gilligan, 1992), binds us to community, and is embedded in culture (Walsh, 1991).

Through phenomenological in-depth interviewing, my presence, responsiveness, and interest in learning from women about women's experiences may have encouraged women to listen to their voices, as well as the voices of others, and to respond to their own thoughts and feelings, as well as to the feelings and concerns of others (Miller, 1986; also see Miller, 1992). Also, this study might have helped to bring women's voices into the center of educational and social science theory and research and inspired other female researchers to examine women's experiences.

As I undertook two pilot interviews in 1990 (Burke, 1990, in Seidman, 1991) on the experience of communication majors, I realized the value and strength of women's voices when they were encouraged to reconstruct and make meaning of their experiences. One reason my pilot study was successful was that phenomenological in-depth interviewing provided as much equity as possible in the interview relationships. In the pilot interviews, I interviewed female communication majors and, at the time, I was very close to the participants' age. The participants were in their early twenties and I was 26 years old. These two elements, my gender and age, may have made the participants feel more comfortable in

the interview relationship and encouraged equity between myself and the participants.

In the present study, I am not sure that female participants would have wanted to disclose certain experiences to a male. For example, during an interview on women and their television experiences, would a female participant want to disclose that she was anorexic because of television images? Or that she found female television portrayals degrading to women? She might not have disclosed these aspects of her experience to a male data collector. I felt confident that my gender helped create a comfortable environment for the participant and encouraged more equity between myself and the participant.

Finally, I chose phenomenological in-depth interviewing because the method allowed the participants rather than the researcher to create the meaning from the study. It was the participants' experiences and the meaning they created from their experiences expressed in their own voices that became the substance of the research.

By listening to, understanding, and reporting women's experiences with television viewing, I hoped to accomplish three things: (1) to present meaningful work that was worthy of others' attention, (2) to help to bring women's voices into the center of educational and social science theory and research, and, (3) to encourage self-discovery and empowerment on the part of the participants and readers of the study.

Demographic Questionnaire

The second method I used to gather demographic information about the participants was a questionnaire (see Appendix A). The

questionnaire was divided into three sections: (1) academic, marital and occupational status (self); (2) family background; and, (3) television viewing habits and access to television. The following list outlines the questions asked in each section:

1) Self

A) Academic status?

B) Major (field of study)?

C) What is your marital status?

D) Do you have children? If so, what are their ages and gender?

E) Occupation (indicate full/part time)?

F) Annual income (include spouse if appropriate)?

2) Family

A) How many siblings do you have (indicate age and gender)?

B) Mother's education?

C) Mother's occupation?

D) Did your mother work when you were a child (indicate when)?

F) Father's education?

G) Father's occupation?

H) Did your father work when you were a child (indicate when)?

I) Parents' annual income?

3) Television Viewing

A) What types of television programs do you prefer to watch (comedy, drama, news, etc.)?

B) What television programs do you watch on a regular basis?

C) How many hours of television do you watch per week?

D) What time of the day do you watch the most television?

F) Whom do you watch television with?

G) How many television sets did you have in your home growing up?

H) Did you have a television set in your bedroom when you were growing up?

I) Did you have a video cassette recorder (VCR) in your home when you were growing up?

Please answer the following questions if you do not live with your parents now:

A) How many television sets do you have in your home?

B) Do you have a television set in your bedroom?

C) Do you own a VCR?

The purpose of the questionnaire was to provide useful information that was inappropriate to ask during the interview process. I asked the participants to fill out the questionnaire after their last interviews so that the information in the questionnaire would not bias or influence the interview process.

Selection of the Participants

I interviewed twelve female students attending a state university located in the North East. I felt that twelve participants 36 interviews provided me with enough information to make connections and draw themes from the research.

I had access to a variety of students from a state university located in the North East. The participants included both graduate and undergraduate female students and were selected by asking students from Speech Communication courses to participate and by asking these students to recommend other students to participate. It is important to note that Speech Communication was a University requirement for all undergraduate students. Participants were asked to volunteer for the study. The three criteria for selection were: (1) the student was female; (2) there was a variety of students of traditional college age (six students who were 18-23 years old) and students of nontraditional college age (six students who were 30-45 years old), and (3) the student had claimed, through a preliminary interview, that she watched at least eight hours of television per week. My goal was to include women from two age groups, varied fields of study, and varied life experiences so that I could bring as much balance as possible to the study. It is important to note that I was doubtful that women from a wide variety of economic backgrounds would be included in the study because, in general, the University attracts middle-class students. Also, this study did not focus on ethnic and racial backgrounds but rather on college women in general. Furthermore, because I was asking the participants to volunteer for the study rather than selecting them myself, I was not sure of the ethnic and racial mix that

would be available to interview. It turned out that all participants were American and Caucasian.

Miller (1992) raised a research concern relevant to my study. Miller (1992) argued that if researchers select women participants with all-female influences (i.e. fields of study, cooperating teachers, female professors, etc.), readers might claim that the researcher manipulated the study to prove a point about gender and power. As a precaution to this possibility, I did not include participants whose major academic focus was on women's studies.

I believe that my age and gender helped reduce the inequity between the participants and myself and may have helped create a trusting environment during the interview on women and their television experiences. I was 29 years old at the time and my age fell in between the participants' ages (18-23 years of age and 30-45 years of age). Also, I tried to create equity between the participant and myself by matching her mood, sense of humor, and shared interests.

Time Frame for Collecting the Data

In October, 1993, I approached several Speech Communication classes, explained the purpose of my research and asked for volunteers to participate in the study. After my initial visit, I conducted a preliminary interview with each potential participant to find out if they met the above criteria for the study. If they did and were still willing to participate in the study, I asked them to complete a written consent form (see Appendix B), and scheduled the first interview. At this time, I asked students to recommend other volunteers to participate in the study. With the

students' permission (those who were being asked to volunteer), I contacted them by phone or in person and explained the purpose of my research and asked if they would volunteer to participate in the study. If they were willing to participate in the study, I repeated the above process. The second and third interviews were scheduled prior to the first interview and were held at a time that fit into each participant's schedule.

This process continued until I had six participants who were 18-23 years-old and six participants who were 30-45 years-old. All 12 participants met the above criteria. The data were collected from November, 1993, to April, 1994 and included the Fall 1993 and Spring 1994 semesters at the University site.

Participant Drop-out Rate

Of the 12 women selected to participate in this study, only one participant withdrew from the interview process. Shortly after the first interview, she said that she felt uncomfortable with the audio taping of the interviews. I explained to her the reason for audio taping the interviews and reassured her that she could withdraw from the interview process at any time and at that I would return the audio tapes to her. Within the week, she withdrew from the interview process. She signed the withdrawal form, I returned the audio tapes to her and I thanked her for her participation in the research project. I selected another participant to replace this participant.

I wrote a withdrawal form for those participants who chose to withdraw from the interview process (see Appendix C). The withdrawal form notified the participant of the following protections: (1) a promise

that the audio-tape(s) from her interview(s) would be returned to her; (2) a promise that no material generated from her interview(s) existed; and (3) a promise that no material generated from her interview(s) would be used as part of my research based on the meaning college women make of their television experiences or in any other future publication.

Protection for the Participants

I provided protection for the participants in four ways: (1) by a written consent form; (2) by a written questionnaire consent form; (3) by a withdrawal form; and (4) by the fact that I did not interview any of my students or Communication majors.

I wrote a consent form that each participant signed prior to the first interview (see Appendix B). The consent form notified the participants of the following protections: (1) the use of pseudonyms for persons, schools, cities, towns, and counties included in their interviews; (2) a guarantee that they could withdraw from the interview process at any time; and (3) freedom to withhold any part of the interview material, if they notified me within five days after the final interview.

I wrote a questionnaire consent form that each participant signed prior to completing the questionnaire (see Appendix A). The questionnaire consent form notified the participants of the following protections: (1) the option to leave any question blank that they did not wish to answer; (2) the use of pseudonyms substituting for all names of persons, schools, cities, towns, and counties included in the questionnaire; and, (3) freedom to withhold any part of the information on the questionnaire, if they notified me within five days after the final interview.

Analysis of the Data

It is important to note that I entered this research having studied communication and related issues in my undergraduate and graduate career, and have worked as a college professor in a related field of study for four years. As a result, I tried my best to come to this study with an open attitude, seeking what emerged as important from the participants' transcripts.

Also, it is important to note that my presence as the data collector may have influenced the responses of the participants during the interviews because I asked questions, worked with the material, selected from it, and interpreted, described and analyzed it (Seidman, 1991). No matter how hard I worked at minimizing the effects, I could not avoid being part of the interview process. For example, some of my own biases may have included my gender, my own television viewing, and my professional and socioeconomic status. At best, I tried to be conscious of my presence and to minimize my influence over the interviews and resulting materials. I reflected this consciousness in three ways: (1) I encouraged the participant rather than the interviewer to lead the interview; (2) I did not ask leading questions; and (3) I reported only those themes that were common among the participants rather than those themes that I found interesting.

Throughout my report of women's television viewing experiences, I identified each narrative by indicating the speaker's pseudonym. In addition, I indicated with brackets when the words belonged to someone other than the participants. In addition, I used ellipses when omitting

material and deleted characteristics commonly found in spoken language such as "like," "uhm," and "you know."

After each interview, I read each transcript while listening to the audio tape and marked with red markers those passages that I found interesting. As I read/listened to the interview material, I began to identify, compare and interrelate data from the transcripts. I continued to analyze interview data as the research progressed. This process allowed me to compare issues found within the interviews and to pursue those issues in future interviews.

Once I had finished the interview process and transcribed the audio tapes, I re-identified, marked, and labeled common categories of issues, concerns, and experiences. I completed this process for each participant. It is important to note that these labels changed and were redefined throughout the reading process.

As I examined the material, I looked for common themes and patterns. During this process, I categorized the material using two methods. The first method included an individual file for each participant. Within each participant's file was an itemized list of their marked passages and where they were located. The second method grouped all of the participants' marked passages according to common themes. These two methods allowed me to identify, select and cross reference interview material both quickly and efficiently. Also, the two methods allowed me to distinguish themes from non-themes. For example, one or two participants may have discussed a television viewing experience at length but the grouping may have demonstrated that the majority of participants did not discuss that experience. The collection of common themes and patterns was used to report the meaning college

women made from their television viewing experience. Furthermore, I used this material to demonstrate the usefulness and effectiveness of the methodology. Lastly, I used this material to discuss future implications for women and for the fields of education and communication studies. Throughout my study, I was particularly careful to craft common themes that were faithful to the participants' words and to the meanings they made of their experience.

Chapter Summary

Phenomenological in-depth interviewing and a demographic questionnaire were used to investigate college women's television viewing experience and the meaning they make of that experience. The rationale for phenomenological in-depth interviewing included: (1) it encouraged more equity between the researcher and the participant than other quantitative methodologies; (2) it was based on language, which is central to our way of knowing and making meaning from our experiences; (3) it gave voice to women, who have not been adequately studied and are too often not heard (Spitzack & Carter, 1987); and (4) it allowed meaning to emerge from the text rather than from the researcher's preconceived notions.

The rationale for using the demographic questionnaire included: (1) to gather demographic information about the participants that may not have emerged during the interview process; and (2) to gather demographic information about the participants that was inappropriate to ask during the interview process.

The selection of the participants included six college women between the ages of 18-23 and six college women between the ages of 30-45, all of whom claimed to have watched at least eight hours of television per week, and who volunteered to participate in the study. Protection for the participant was provided using four methods: (1) a written consent form; (2) a written questionnaire consent form; (3) a written withdrawal form; and (4) the fact that I did not interview any of my students or Communication majors. The analysis of the data included crafting common themes from the participants' interviews and questionnaires that were faithful to their words and to the meanings they created from their television viewing experiences.

CHAPTER IV

REPORT OF THE DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

AND

PARTICIPANTS' INDIVIDUAL PROFILES

The following chapter reports on the participants' demographic data, followed by a brief profile of each participant. The purpose of this chapter is to provide clarity for the reader and to act as a convenient reference source. The chapter is divided into two sections: the demographic data and the participants' profiles.

Demographic Data

The report of the demographic data is divided into twelve categories: (1) academic status, (2) family relations, (3) occupation and estimated annual income, (4) mother's occupation and educational attainment, (5) father's occupation and educational attainment, (6) parents' estimated annual income, (7) growing up: the number of household televisions and video cassette recorders (VCRs), (8) present day: the number of household televisions and VCRs, (9) number of television hours watched per week, (10) types of television programming watched, (11) whom the participants watched television with, and (12) parents' educational attainment in relation to the amount of television hours the participant watched per week. The data were gathered from the participants' preliminary interviews and questionnaires.

Academic Status

Seventeen percent of the younger participants and 33% of the older participants were graduate students. Eighty-three percent of the younger participants and 66% of the older participants were undergraduate students (see Table 1). None of the students were freshmen.

Table 1
Academic Status of Participant

Academic Status	Age of the Participant		
	Younger 18-23 Years Old	Older 30-45 Years Old	Total Number
Undergraduate	5	4	9
Graduate	1	2	3
n=12			

Family Relations

Thirty-three percent of the participants were married, 53% were single and 17% were divorced. It is important to note that one of the older participants was divorced and remarried (see Table 2). All of the participants had at least one sibling and no more than four siblings. Twenty-five percent of the participants had children (ranging from one to four children) and 75% of the participants did not have children (see Table

3). Of the three women who had children, none had sons and all had daughters ranging from three to 25 years of age.

Table 2
Marital Status of Participants

Marital Status	Age of the Participant		
	Younger 18-23 Years Old	Older 30-45 Years Old	Total Number
Married	0	4	4
Single	6	1	7
Divorced	0	2	2*
n=12 * note that one of the older participants was divored and remarried			

Table 3
Parental Status

Parental Status	Age of the Participant		
	Younger 18-23 Years Old	Older 30-45 Years Old	Total Number
Have Children	0	3	3
No Children	6	3	9
n=12			

Occupation and Estimated Annual Income

Twenty-five percent of the participants worked full time, 33% worked part time and 42% did not work (see Table 4). The older participants' average estimated annual income (including their spouses) was $53,000 (based on four participants, two participants did not answer). The younger participants' average estimated annual income was $7,000.

Table 4
Occupation of Participants

Work Status	Age of the Participant		
	Younger 18-23 Years Old	Older 30-45 Years Old	Total Number
Full-time	0	3	3
Part-time	4	0	4
Did not work	2	3	5
n=12			

Mother's Occupation and Educational Attainment

Seventy-five percent of the participants reported that when they were growing up their mothers worked full time, 17% reported that their mothers did not work and 8% reported that their mothers worked part time (see Table 5).

Table 5
Mother's Employment Status

Mother's Work Status	Age of the Participant		
	Younger 18-23 Years Old	Older 30-45 Years Old	Total Number
Full-time	5	4	9
Part-time	1	0	1
Did not work	0	2	2
n=12			

The participants reported that their mothers had the following highest level of education: 33% high school diploma, 17% some college attendance, 17% professional and vocational degree including nursing and secretarial school, 17% grade school, 8% less than high school and 8% Masters degree (see Table 6).

Father's Occupation and Educational Attainment

One hundred percent of the participants reported that when they were growing up their fathers worked full time. The participants reported that their fathers had the following highest level of education: 42% high school diploma, 25% college degree, 17% grade school, 8% less than high school and 8% Masters degree (see Table 7).

Table 6
Mother's Educational Attainment

Mother's Education	Age of the Participant		
	Younger 18-23 Years Old	Older 30-45 Years Old	Total Number
Masters Degree	1	0	1
Some College	1	1	2
Professional or Vocational	1	1	2
High School	2	2	4
Less than High School	1	0	1
Grade School	0	2	2
n=12			

Parents' Estimated Annual Income

The average estimated annual income for the older participants' parents was $61,375 (based on four participants, two participants did not answer). The average estimated annual income for the younger participants' parents was $61,666. This finding demonstrated that the participants were more economically affluent than the researcher had expected.

Table 7
Father's Educational Attainment

Father's Education	Age of the Participant		
	Younger 18-23 Years Old	Older 30-45 Years Old	Total Number
Masters Degree	0	1	1
College	2	1	3
High School	3	2	5
Less than High School	1	0	1
Grade School	0	2	2
n=12			

The following two sections report on the number of televisions and VCRs the participants had in their homes as children and as adults. This information was important to this study because it helps to answer the question: Does the number of televisions and VCRs in the home influence television viewing? For example, does the number of televisions in the home influence the amount of time spent watching television? Does having only one television in the home encourage family negotiation in relation to television viewing? Does having more than one television in the home encourage solo viewing rather than communal viewing? The purpose of asking the participants how many televisions and VCRs they had in their homes as children and as adults was to provide useful information in relation to the above questions.

Growing Up: The Number of Household Televisions and VCRs

The following information is based on when the participants were children and living with their parents. The younger participants reported that when they were growing up they had an average of 2.6 televisions in their homes (see Table 8a) and 50% reported having a television in their bedroom (see Table 8b). In addition, 67% of the younger participants reported having at least one VCR in their home (see Table 8b).

The older participants reported that when they were growing up they had an average of 1.8 televisions in their homes (see Table 8a) and none reported having a television in their bedroom (see Table 8b). In addition, 2% of the older participants reported having at least one VCR in their homes (see Table 8b). It is important to note that many of the older participants did not have a VCR in their homes as children because they did not exist in the public at large at the time.

Table 8
Number of Televisions in Household When the Participants Were Children
a.

	Age of the Participant		
	Younger 18-23 Years Old	Older 30-45 Years Old	Total Average
Average Number of Televisions In Household	2.6	1.8	2.2
n=12			

Table 8
Number of Televisions in Household When the Participants Were Children
b.

	Age of the Participant		
	Younger 18-23 Years Old	Older 30-45 Years Old	Total Number
Television in Bedroom	3	0	3
At Least One VCR in Household	4	1	5
n=12			

Present Day: The Number of Household Televisions and VCRs

The following information is based on the time of the study as opposed to information in the previous section, which was based on when the participants were children. The younger participants reported having an average of 1.5 televisions in their homes (see Table 9a), and none reported having a television in their bedroom (see Table 9b). In addition, 100% of the younger participants reporting having at least one VCR in their homes (see Table 9b).

The older participants reported having an average of 3.5 televisions in their homes (see Table 9a) and 83% reported having a television in their bedroom (see Table 9b). In addition, 100% of the older participants reported having at least one VCR in their homes (see Table 9b).

Table 9
Number of Televisions in Household
At the Time of Study
a.

	Age of the Participant		
	Younger 18-23 Years Old	Older 30-45 Years Old	Total Average
Average Number of Televisions In Household	1.5	3.5	2.5
n=12			

Table 9
Number of Televisions in Household
At the Time of Study
b.

	Age of the Participant		
	Younger 18-23 Years Old	Older 30-45 Years Old	Total Number
Television in Bedroom	0	5	5
At Least One VCR in Household	6	6	12
n=12			

Number of Television Hours Watched per Week

The younger participants reported watching an average of 11.5 hours of television per week and the older participants reported watching an average of 10.5 hours of television per week (see Table 10).

Types of Television Programming Watched

The participants reported watching the following television programming: 92% of them watched situation comedies; 92% television news including local, national and evening news magazines; 83% television movies; 75% educational programming including PBS, The Discovery Channel, the Arts & Entertainment Channel and documentaries; 58% drama; 58% soap operas including day time and evening soap operas; 42% day time talk shows; 25% science fiction; 25% action adventure; 17% music cable stations including MTV and VH-1; 8% detective and 8% game shows (see Table 11).

Table 10
Estimated Number of Hours
of Television Watched per Week

	Age of the Participant		
	Younger 18-23 Years Old	Older 30-45 Years Old	Total Average
Hours	11.5	10.5	11
n=12			

Table 11
Types of Television Programming Watched

Television Programming	Age of the Participant		
	Younger 18-23 Years Old	Older 30-45 Years Old	Total Number
Situation Comedies	5	6	11
News	5	6	11
Television Movies	5	5	10
Education	5	4	9
Drama	4	3	7
Soap Operas	5	2	7
Talk Shows (day time)	3	2	5
Science Fiction	1	2	3
Action-Adventure	3	0	3
Music television	1	1	2
Dectective	1	0	1
Game Shows	0	1	1
n=12			

With Whom the Participants Watch Television

The participants were asked whom they watched television with. The following 21 responses were reported: seven responses were alone; four responses were significant other (other than husband); three responses were husband; two responses were daughter(s); two responses were family (other than husband or children); two responses were roommates; and one response was co-workers (see Table 12).

Parents' Educational Attainment in Relation to the Amount of Television Hours the Participants Watched per Week

The participants whose parents had a high school education or less watched more television per week than the participants whose parents had more than a high school education (see Table 13). On average, these women watched six more hours of television per week than the participants whose parents had more than a high school education. This finding included 50% of the younger participants and 50% of the older participants. The only exception to this finding was Helen, an older participant, who was double majoring at the time of this study (see the participants' profile). Perhaps her additional academic workload restricted her television viewing. In addition, the three older participants whose parents had a high school education or less and who watched more television per week had one to three more televisions in their homes than the other older participants.

Table 12
With Whom the Participants Reported Watching Television

With Whom They Watched Television	Age of the Participant		
	Younger 18-23 Years Old	Older 30-45 Years Old	Total Number
Alone	4	3	7
Significant Other (not husband)	3	1	4
Husband	N/A	3	3
Daughter	N/A	2	2
Family (not husband or children)	2	0	2
Roommates	2	0	2
Co-workers	0	1	1

n=12
N/A= does not apply

Table 13
Parents' Educational Attainment, Occupational Status and Annual Income in Relation to the Amount of Television Hours the Participants Watched per Week

Participant	Mother		Father		Parents' Annual Income	Number of TV Hours the Participant Watched Per Week
	Educ.	Employ.	Educ.	Employ.		
<u>Younger</u>						
Amelia	HS	Yes	HS	Yes	$50-60,000	20-25
Beth	HS	Yes	HS	Yes	$100,000	10
Ellen	V	Yes	CD	Yes*	$30,000	8
Frances	MS	Yes	HS	Yes	$80,000	8
Gabriella	SC	Yes	CD	Yes	$50,000	8
Kate	LH	Yes	LH	Yes	$50-60,000	10-15
<u>Older</u>						
Diane	HS	No	HS	Yes	$50-75,000	15
Helen	HS	Yes	HS	Yes	NR	8
Irene	GS	No	GS	Yes	$25,000	14
Janet	GS	Yes	GS	Yes	$60,000	10
Linda	P	Yes	CD	Yes	$98,000	8
Marie	SC	Yes	MS	Yes	NR	8

CD=College Degree, GS=Grade School, HS=High School,
LH=Less than High School, MS=Masters Degree, P=Professional Degree,
SC=Some College, V=Vocational Degree, NP=No Report

*Ellen's father was employed when she was a child but he was unemployed at the time of this study.

Participants' Profiles

The following section reports on the participants' individual profiles. The data were gathered from the participants' preliminary interviews, in-depth interviews and questionnaires. All of the participants reported watching at least eight hours of television per week. If a participant reported watching more television than eight hours per week, it will be indicated in her individual profile. Also, the data on what the participants reported watching will vary because some participants reported more thorough information than others. For example, some of the participants not only named the type of programming they watched (i.e., situation comedies) but also named the specific program they watched (i.e., *Seinfeld*). The participants' individual profiles will be divided into two categories: the younger participants (ages 18-23) and the older participants (ages 30-45) and will be listed in alphabetical order. Also, the participants' pseudonyms will be substituted for their real names and will appear as such throughout this study. Furthermore, in order to provide clarity for the reader, each participant's profile will report three categories of information: (1) self and family, (2) television viewing and (3) access to television.

Younger Participants

Amelia

Amelia was 22 years old and a fifth year senior. Her major was journalism. She was not married and did not have children. She worked

part time in the billing department at a cardiology office. Her estimated annual income was $8,000. She had one sister who was 18 years old. Her mother had a high school diploma and worked in the billing department at a cardiology office. Her father had a high school education and was self employed in the construction field. Her parents' estimated annual income was between $50-60,000.

Amelia reported watching 20-25 hours of television per week, mostly after 4 p.m. She reported watching television mostly alone and with her roommates, mother and sister. She reported watching the following television programming on a regular basis: soap operas, situation comedies, dramas, movies, some educational programming, and news.

As a child, Amelia reported having three televisions in her home, two VCRs, and no television in her bedroom. At the time of this study, Amelia reported having one television in her home, at least one VCR, and no television in her bedroom. Amelia lived in an off-campus apartment with roommates and was a member of a sorority.

Beth

Beth was 21 years old and a senior public health major. She was not married and did not have children. She did not work. Her estimated annual income was $5,000. She had one sister who was 31 years old and one brother who was 30 years old. Her mother had a high school diploma and worked as a meat wrapper. Her father had a high school diploma and worked as a meat cutter. Her parents' estimated annual salary was $100,000.

Beth reported watching 10 hours of television per week, almost always alone and in the evening. Beth reported watching the following television programming on a regular basis: action adventure, educational programming, movies, news, and *The Oprah Winfrey Show*.

As a child, Beth reported having three televisions in her home, at least one VCR, and a television in her bedroom. Beth lived with her parents.

Ellen

Ellen was 23 years old and a graduate student. Her major was physical education. She was not married and did not have children. She worked part time as a personal trainer. Her estimated annual income was $8,000. She had two sisters who were 29 and 28 years old. Her mother had completed secretarial school and worked as a dietary aide in a city hospital. Her father had a college degree and worked as an accountant. At the time of this study, her father was unemployed. Her parents' estimated annual income was $30,000.

Ellen reported watching television with her friends or alone and mostly in the evenings. She reported watching the following television programming on a regular basis: situation comedies including *Cheers*, *Mad About You*, and *Wings*; news including *ABC Evening News*; educational programming including The Arts & Entertainment Channel; movies; talk shows including *The Oprah Winfrey Show*; soap operas including *Beverly Hills, 90210*; and *Melrose Place*; dramas including *NYPD Blue*; and music cable channels including MTV and VH-1.

As a child, Ellen reported having one television in her house, no VCR in the house and no television in her bedroom. At the time of this study, Ellen reported having two televisions in her home, at least one VCR, and no television in her bedroom. Ellen lived independently off-campus.

Frances

Frances was a 19 year old sophomore education major. She was not married and did not have children. She worked part time as a printer's apprentice. Her estimated annual income was $5,000. She had one sister who was 16 years old and two brothers who were 15 and seven years old, respectively. Her mother had a Masters degree and was an elementary school teacher. Her step-father had a high school diploma and worked as a printer. Frances did not indicate if her mother had been divorced. Her parents' (mother and stepfather) estimated annual income was $80,000.

Frances reported watching television with her boyfriend, mostly in the evenings. She reported watching the following television programming on a regular basis: situation comedies including *Married With Children;* action adventure; soap operas including *General Hospital;* dramas including *Cops;* news; educational programming; movies; and talk shows including *Jenny Jones* and *Ricki Lake*.

As a child, Frances reported having two televisions in her home, at least one VCR, and no television in her bedroom. Frances lived with her parents.

Gabriella

Gabriella was 20 years old and a sophomore. Her major was biology. She was not married and did not have children. She worked part time as a veterinary assistant. Her estimated annual income was $10,000. She had one brother who was 23 years old. Her mother had completed her freshman year in college and was self employed as a dog groomer. Her father had a college degree and was a supervisor for a utility company. Gabriella's parents were divorced. She did not indicate her mother's estimated annual income. Her father's estimated annual income was $50,000.

Gabriella reported watching television with her boyfriend, father and alone. Most of her television viewing occured in the evenings. She reported watching the following television programming on a regular basis: situation comedies; detective; action adventure; science fiction including *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, *Deep Space Nine*, and *Sea Quest DSV*; soap operas; drama; news; educational programming; and movies.

As a child, Gabriella reported having four televisions in her home, at least one VCR, and a television in her bedroom. At the time of this study, Gabriella reported having two televisions in her home, at least one VCR, and no television in her bedroom. Gabriella lived with her aunt.

Kate

Kate was 20 years old and a junior. Her major was social work. She was not married and did not have children. She did not work. Her estimated annual income was $6,000. She had one sister who was 13 years

old. Her parents were immigrants and both earned less than a high school diploma. They were not formally educated in the United States. Kate never said where her parents were from. Her mother worked in laundry services in a city hospital. Her father was a contractor. Her parents' estimated annual salary was between $50-60,000.

Kate reported watching 10-15 hours of television per week, with her roommates and in the evening. Kate reported watching the following television programming on a regular basis: situation comedies including *Seinfeld*, and *Roseanne*; and soap operas including *Beverly Hills, 90210* and *Melrose Place*.

As a child, Kate reported having three televisions in her home, no VCR, and a television in her bedroom. At the time of this study, Kate reported having one television in her home, at least one VCR, and no television in her bedroom. Kate lived in an apartment with roommates and was a member of a sorority.

Older Participants

Diane

Diane was 35 years old and a graduate student. Her major was elementary education. She was married and had a daughter who was three years old. She was pregnant at the time of this study. She was an elementary school teacher and her estimated annual income (including her spouse) was $90,000. She had one sister who was 33 years old and one brother who was 30 years old. Her mother had a high school diploma and did not work. Her father had a high school diploma and was a salesman.

Her parents' estimated annual income was $50-75,000. Her parents were divorced.

Diane reported watching 15 hours of television per week and watched with her daughter and husband. Her television viewing was between 7 p.m. and 11 p.m. Diane reported watching the following television programming on a regular basis: situation comedies including *Seinfeld*, and *Murphy Brown*; dramas including *Sisters*; movies; talk shows; and news including *48 Hours* and *Primetime Live*.

As a child, Diane reported having three televisions in her home, no VCR and no television in her bedroom. At the time of this study, Diane reported having four televisions in her home, at least one VCR, and a television in her bedroom. Diane lived in a house with her daughter and husband.

Helen

Helen was 34 years old and a senior. She was double majoring in education and English. She was married and did not have children. She did not work. Her estimated annual income (including her spouse) was $45,000. She had two sisters who were 39 and 38 years old and a brother who was 36 years old. Her mother had a high school diploma. Helen said that her mother worked when she was a child but did not indicate what she did for a living. Her father had a high school diploma and was a welder and business owner. Helen did not report her parents' estimated annual income.

Helen reported watching television mostly alone and watched after 8 p.m. She reported watching the following television programming on a

regular basis: situation comedies including *Grace Under Fire*; educational programming; news; and soap operas including *General Hospital*.

As a child, Helen reported having one television in her home, no VCR, and no television in her bedroom. At the time of this study, Helen reported having two televisions in her home, at least one VCR, and a television in her bedroom. Helen lived in a house with her husband.

Irene

Irene was 45 years old and a senior. Her major was special education. She was married and had two daughters who were 21 and 22 years old. She did not work and did not report her estimated annual income. She had three sisters and one brother. She did not indicate their ages; however, she was the second to the youngest followed by her brother, who was the youngest. Her mother had a sixth-grade education and did not work when she was a child. Her father had a sixth-grade education and worked for the sanitation department. He was employed by a neighboring state. Her parents' estimated annual salary was $25,000.

Irene reported watching 14 hours of television per week with her husband or alone and watched in the evenings. Irene reported watching the following television programming on a regular basis: situation comedies; science fiction; news; educational programming including PBS; movies; and game shows.

As a child, Irene reported having one television in her home, no VCR, and no television in her bedroom. At the time of this study, Irene reported having six televisions in her home, at least one VCR, and a

television in her bedroom. Irene lived in a house with her daughters and husband.

Janet

Janet was 31 years old and a graduate student. Her major was social work. She was engaged to be married and did not have children. She was a teacher in a facility for autistic adults and her estimated annual income was $26,000. She had one brother who was 33 years old and one sister who was 26 years old. Her parents were Portuguese immigrants and were not formally educated in the United States. Her mother had a sixth- grade education and worked as a food prep in a diner. Her father had a third-grade education and was a landscaper. Her parents' estimated annual income was $60,000.

Janet reported watching 10 hours of television per week, with her fiancé, co-workers and alone. Her television viewing was in the a.m., evenings and late night hours. Janet reported watching the following television programming on a regular basis: soap operas including *Beverly Hills, 90210* and *Melrose Place*; Sunday Night Movies; talk shows; situation comedies including *Roseanne*, and *Seinfeld*; news including *Good Morning America*; drama including *Birds of Paradise*; and MTV.

As a child, Janet reported having three televisions in her home, no VCR and no television in her bedroom. At the time of this study, Janet reported having five televisions in her home, three VCRs, and a television in her bedroom. Janet lived in a house with her fiancé, her brother and one roommate.

Linda

Linda was 45 years old and a junior. Her major was sociology. She was married, had four daughters who were 25, 23, 21 and seven years old. Her youngest daughter was adopted. Linda did not work and her estimated annual income (including her spouse) was $98,000. Linda was divorced and remarried. She had three sisters who were 49, 44, 38 and 33 years old. Her mother had completed nursing school and worked as a registered nurse. Her father completed college and was a wholesaler. Her parents' estimated annual income was $98,000.

Linda reported watching television "at times" with her daughter and husband, otherwise she reported watching television alone and in the evening. Linda reported watching the following television programming on a regular basis: situation comedies; drama; news including *Good Morning America*, *20/20* and the local ABC affiliate; educational programming including PBS and The Discovery Channel; and movies.

As a child, Linda reported having two televisions in her home, no VCR and no television in her bedroom. At the time of this study, Linda reported having three televisions in her home, at least one VCR, and a television in her bedroom. Linda lived in a house with her youngest daughter and husband.

Marie

Marie was 30 years old and a senior. Her major was political science. She was divorced and did not have children. She worked as a paralegal. Her estimated annual income was $30,000. She had one

brother who was 33 years old. Her mother had completed some college and worked as a clerical worker. Her father had a Masters degree, worked as a clerical worker and held a regular position as a teacher. Marie did not report her parents' estimated annual income.

Marie reported watching television mostly alone and late at night. She reported watching the following television programming on a regular basis: situation comedies including *Seinfeld*, *Frasier*, and *Murphy Brown*; science fiction including *Star Trek*; news including *20/20* and *Nightline*; educational programming; and movies.

As a child, Marie reported having one television in her house and did not have a VCR until she was in high school. In addition, she did not have a television in her bedroom. At the time of this study, Marie reported having one television in her home, one VCR (that was a "gift"), and no television in her bedroom. Marie was in the military prior to attending college and she lived alone off-campus.

Chapter Summary

The demographic data showed that 17% of the younger participants and 33% of the older participants were graduate students. Eighty-three percent of the younger participants and 66% of the older participants were undergraduate students. Thirty-three percent of the participants were married, 53% were single and 17% were divorced (one of the older participants was divorced and remarried--see Table 2 for clarification, page 67). All of the participants had at least one sibling and no more than four siblings. Twenty-five percent of the participants had daughters ranging from three to 25 years of age and none of the

participants had sons. Twenty-five percent of the participants worked full time, 33% worked part time and 42% did not work. The older participants' average estimated annual income (including their spouses) was $53,000 (based on four participants, two participants did not answer). The younger participants' average estimated annual income was $7,000.

Seventy-five percent of the participants reported that when they were children their mothers worked full time, 17% reported that their mothers did not work and 8% reported that their mother worked part time. Also, the participants reported that their mothers had the following education: 33% high school diploma, 17% some college attendance, 17% professional and vocational degrees, 17% grade school, 8% less than high school and 8% Masters degree. All of the participants reported that when they were children their fathers worked full time. In addition, the participants reported that their fathers had the following education: 42% high school diploma, 25% college degree, 17% grade school, 8% less than high school and 8% Masters degree. The average estimated annual income for the participants' parents was $61,521 (based on 10 participants, two did not answer). This finding was higher than the researcher had expected.

The demographic data showed that the participants have always had relatively easy access to television. As children, the younger participants had an average of 2.6 televisions in their homes and 50% had a television in their bedroom. In addition, 67% of the younger participants had at least one VCR in their homes as children. As children, the older participants had an average of 1.8 televisions in their homes and none had a television in their bedroom. In addition, only 2% of the older participants had at least one VCR in their homes while growing up. As

adults, the younger participants had an average of 1.5 televisions in their homes and none had a television in their bedroom. As adults, 100% of the younger participants had at least one VCR in their homes. As adults, the older participants had an average of 3.5 televisions in their homes and 83% had a television in their bedroom. In addition, 100% of the older participants had at least one VCR in their homes.

The younger participants watched an average of 11.5 hours of television per week and the older participants watched an average of 10.5 hours of television per week. The participants watched the following television programming: 92% situation comedies; 92% television news including local, national and evening news magazines; 83% television movies; 75% educational programming including PBS, The Discovery Channel, the Arts & Entertainment Channel and documentaries; 58% drama; 58% soap operas including day time and evening soap operas; 42% day time talk shows; 25% science fiction; 25% action adventure; 17% music cable stations including MTV and VH-1; 8% detective and 8% game shows. In addition, the participants watched television alone, with their significant other (other than husband), husbands, daughter(s), families (other than husband or children), roommates, and co-workers.

The demographic data showed that the participants whose parents had a high school education or less currently watched more television per week than the participants whose parents had more than a high school education. On average, these women watched six more hours of television per week than the participants whose parents had more than a high school education. In addition, those older participants whose parents had a high school education or less watched more television per week and

had one to three more televisions in their homes than the other older participants.

The participants' individual profiles are brief (three paragraphs per participant); therefore, rather than provide a short summary of the participants' profiles here, it is recommended that the reader refer back to the beginning of this chapter, when needed, to obtain information about the individual participants. Again, the participants' profiles are divided into two sections including the younger participants and the older participants and are listed in alphabetical order. Furthermore, each participant's profile includes the following information: (1) self and family, (2) television viewing, and (3) access to television.

CHAPTER V

REPORT OF THE DATA:

THE PLACE OF TELEVISION IN COLLEGE WOMEN'S LIVES

The following two chapters report on the findings from the participants' interviews. The data from the 36 interviews (12 participants) included 1,443 pages of single-spaced transcripts. In order to narrow the scope of these chapters, only the most commonly found themes will be reported.

This chapter reports on the role that television played in the participants' lives. The themes include: (1) the reasons why the participants watch television; (2) watching television without their families or watching alone; (3) control over viewing; (4) reading and studying in relation to television viewing; and (5) eating and television viewing.

Why the Participants Watch Television

The participants of this study reported watching television for a variety of reasons, including to learn and be informed, to relax and be entertained, and to escape. In addition, the participants reported that watching and listening to television provided a source of companionship, a way to socialize and feel connected with people, and a way to relieve boredom. Watching television also provided a vehicle to view positive portrayals of people and served as a source of comfort and consistency in their lives (see Table 14). The participants reported that the television programs most often viewed included situation comedies, television news

including local, national and evening news magazines, made-for-television movies, educational programming including PBS, the Discovery Channel and the Arts & Entertainment Network, drama including police and rescue shows, daytime and evening soap operas, and daytime talk shows (see Table 15).

Table 14
Why the Participants Reported Watching Television

Why The Participants Reported Watching TV	Age of the Participant		
	Younger 18-23 Years Old	Older 30-45 Years Old	Total Number
Learn/ Be Informed	5	5	10
Relax/ Be Entertained	5	4	9
Escape	5	2	7
Companionship	2	5	7
Socialize/ Feel Connected	3	4	7
Relieve Boredom	3	2	5
View Positive Portrayals of People	2	1	3
Comfort/ Consistency	2	1	3
n=12			

Table 15
Types of Television Programming Watched

Television Programming	Age of the Participant		
	Younger 18-23 Years Old	Older 30-45 Years Old	Total Number
Situation Comedies	5	6	11
News	5	6	11
Television Movies	5	5	10
Education	5	4	9
Drama	4	3	7
Soap Operas	5	2	7
Talk Shows (day time)	3	2	5
Science Fiction	1	2	3
Action-Adventure	3	0	3
Music television	1	1	2
Detective	1	0	1
Game Shows	0	1	1
n=12			

The following section reports on the reasons why the participants watch television. In order to provide clarity for the reader, each participant's age category will be indicated as each participant is cited. The age categories included the younger participants, ages 18-23, and the

older participants, ages 30-45. The specific age of the participant will not be included in this chapter unless it is relevant to the finding. In addition, the reasons why the participants reported watching television will be listed in order of significance, ranging from the most common to the least common.

To Learn and Be Informed

The most common reason why the participants reported watching television was to learn and be informed. Eighty-three percent of both the younger and older participants reported watching television for this reason (see Table 14). In addition, these participants said that obtaining information from television was easier and more convenient than obtaining information from reading (see more about reading and television below). The following programs and television channels were reportedly watched because they were either educational or informative: both the local and national news, evening news magazines including *Dateline*, *Primetime Live*, *60 Minutes* and *20/20*; television documentaries, PBS, the Discovery Channel, the Arts & Entertainment Network; *Sesame Street*, *ABC AfterSchool Specials*, daytime talk shows, stand-up comedy, and made-for-television movies.

Helen, an older participant, reported that she was "disappointed" with most of the "entertainment" programming on television but felt that she could rely on television news and evening news magazines because they focused on useful information:

> So, that's why I kind of stick to the down to the basic stuff like the news or *20/20*, stuff like that, educational things, because I know I won't be disappointed with it.

Irene, an older participant, reported that she presently watched television to learn as opposed to when she was younger, at which time she watched television to be entertained. It is important to note that Irene was forty-five years old at the time of this study and was completing her undergraduate work in education. She explained how going back to school influenced her television viewing:

> I've changed over the years . . . (pause) I [have] always considered myself an intelligent person, but I didn't have the education that I should have, for a lot of reasons . . . (takes deep breath) And for me . . . I always wanted that college degree. It was (pause) a yearning inside of me that had to be fulfilled. (voice softens) And as I went through school and I began to uncover things that were locked away for me . . . I just looked at life differently. And I began to realize . . . we're all given a certain amount of talents, and once you uncover those talents . . . I think you should really multiply them, and because I uncovered this and realized the worth of education I paid more attention to that, which is why I look at television so differently . . . and that's why I seek out educational programs, because they're there for that reason, they're there for the teaching and for me for the learning. And if it's something that I . . . want to explore further, sometimes they have it for me. You can't always read, and you don't always have the time to do that, so television's kind of a short-cut . . . I enjoyed learning new facts . . . So, because I've changed, so has my interest, and if television's going to offer that, [I] might as well look into it.

Amelia, a younger participant, reported that as she got older she began to like watching more informational television programming. She explained that she liked watching documentaries on 20th century history because she did not learn about this period of history in school. In addition, she also reported that she would rather watch programs about history than read about it:

> I love to watch (pause, softly to herself) what are they called, (pause) . . . World War II documentaries . . . I love history, so I like watching those. Just a couple weeks ago they had this really good program on the Bay of Pigs. (voice rises) A lot of that stuff you never even learn in school, a lot of it. I can't believe most of the 20th century history that they never teach us in school. There's no courses on it really. (pause) I love watching those on TV, there's been a lot of Kennedy stuff on the past couple of days, I like to watch that. (pause, voice rises) So, as I've gotten older my TV viewing has gotten a lot (voice softens) more educated . . . I would rather watch it than read it.

Beth, a younger participant, believed that all television programming was educational. She used *Sesame Street*, the Discovery Channel and situation comedies to illustrate her point:

> It's interesting because the things that I didn't pick up on when I was a kid, I pick up on now. And they [*Sesame Street*] have jokes and things in there for adults that kids don't get. (pause) I think it teaches. (pause) I like it . . . and I learn things . . . when they go to a factory, they show how potato chips are made, (pitch of voice rises) I like it. But I also like the (pause) the animal shows and the [programs] that you learn things from like on . . . [the] Discover[y] [Channel] . . . I think most shows do have some type of message, whether people get it or not. I think basically, even sitcoms shows, have an educational message. (very long period of silence) Like (pause) some TV shows deal with teen pregnancy or using condoms or (pause) racism. I think basically all shows have some type of lesson that you're supposed to learn.

Gabriella, a younger participant, reported that she used to like watching *ABC AfterSchool Specials* because she gained useful information without being lectured to:

> I used to like *ABC AfterSchool Specials* because a lot of them had to do with, I don't know [if] it was coincidence, but they had to do with my age group, like seventh, eighth, ninth grade. So I used to watch those, and I didn't really understand what date rape was and they did one on that and so those were informative without being too stupid.

In addition, Gabriella reported that she liked watching stand-up comedians on television because she learned about politics and women's issues. Again, she reported that learning through television comedy was effective because she was not being lectured to:

> I used to like to watch the comedian shows, like *Comic Strip Live* . . . and that was probably how I started understanding politics (laughing) . . . because . . . they [would] satirize a particular event, and I've always understood satirical comedy, because I knew that they were spoofing them, so I'd just take the opposite of what they're saying and I'm like, "Oh, okay, I understand it now" . . . That's how I [understood] a lot of things, [it] was through those shows, the comic specials . . . After I came here [university site] I heard the word feminism, I had heard of ERA, I didn't really know what it was, then you get some of the female comedians that start talking about it, I'm like, "Oh, okay." (long pause) So those shows kind of [were] eye [openers] for me, but in a less harsh way because it's . . . always easier for me to accept things when it's given to me in a light atmosphere, rather than this is how it is, understand it and know it . . . Those shows were good for me . . . I think a lot of people think that they're just a waste of time, just things to occupy your mind while you're doing nothing, but they really have a lot to say through those jokes.

Diane, an older participant, reported that she liked watching evening news magazines and the Discovery Channel because many of the topics were relevant to her life and served as sources of learning for her:

> I do like to watch the news magazines like *Primetime Live* and *Dateline* and *20/20*. I find those very informative. And I've discovered the Discovery Channel, which tends to be pretty informative, so I like that too . . . For instance there was a show on not too long ago about the birth of a baby. Well, I've already birthed a baby, I know what it's like, but it's so interesting to me to see it under a microscope and to know how (pause) exactly it happened. I mean I know how to make a baby, but to see it, (pause) just the way they showed it in this documentary form, the miracle of life and . . . what a long shot the odds are that you could even make a baby. It just really was cool. It directly related to my life right now. I have watched shows about Parkinson's disease, (pause) which has touched me in a sense because my aunt has it and

> . . . it's not something I could talk to family members about, it's a very upsetting topic, so to sit and watch it on the Discovery Channel, I learned a lot. I like when I learn things. I'm really hungry for knowledge, and I find that the Discovery Channel really gives that to me.

The findings suggested that these women were eager to learn about new information through television that was either relevant to their lives or that they did not obtain elsewhere such as in school. Also, the findings indicated that these women wanted to learn about a wide variety of topics including morality, history, politics, sociology, biology, zoology and education. Lastly, the data showed that these women reported that it was easier and more convenient to learn through watching television than reading a book.

Form of Relaxation and Entertainment

Eighty-three percent of the younger participants and 67% of the older participants reported watching television to relax and be entertained (see Table 14). The most popular television programming to relax to and be entertained by was situation comedies. At the time of this study, the most popular network that the participants reported watching for situation comedies was NBC on Thursday night between 8:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m. The situation comedies in this time slot included *Mad About You*, *Wings*, *Seinfeld*, and *Frasier*. Two other situation comedies that the participants reported watching on a regular basis were *Murphy Brown*, which aired on CBS on Monday night at 9:00 p.m., and *Roseanne*, which aired on ABC on Tuesday nights at 9:00 p.m. It was interesting to note that both *Murphy Brown* and *Roseanne* featured women. The women in

this study reported watching these programs because they were entertaining and helped them to unwind and relax.

Diane, an older participant, reported that Thursday night was her favorite night to watch television because it gave her the opportunity to laugh, something she believed she did not do often enough. Below, she explained why she watched situation comedies on television:

> It's just a way to kind of shut out what's going on in the real world, not necessarily in my own home with problems I might have, but, with all the violence and stuff in the world it's nice just to tune [into] a station and just laugh. And it just makes me feel good to laugh (pause) once in a while. I don't think we laugh as much as we should. And I don't think we have the opportunity to laugh. We have to be so politically correct and God forbid if you hear a joke and it has a Polack in it . . . but it's nice to laugh once (laughs) in a while, (voice rises) not at anybody else's expense, but let's face it, (voice softens) jokes have always been at somebody's expense. So it's nice to tune in and just have a good belly laugh.

Kate, a younger participant, expressed similar reasons for watching situation comedies on television. In addition, she reported that she liked to watch situation comedies because they did not focus on serious messages like many other television programs. Below, she talked specifically about the Thursday night schedule on NBC:

> If anything I watch comedies . . . It's the simplicity of it that makes me laugh and I think (pause) I prefer comedies because maybe I don't (laughs) get enough laughter in a day and those really help me to laugh. I think they help me to unwind a little because I'm just so busy every day . . . Thursday I know that they're on and they're just going to be funny . . . so it makes me want to watch. It's not just some depressing story about (laughs) what's going on in the world because you get that on the news. (pause) And it doesn't have this message tell[ing] you don't do this or don't do that, because you get that thrown at you too. It's just (pause) humor.

Gabriella, a younger participant, reported that she liked watching the Thursday night NBC schedule because the situation comedies made her laugh and relax. She talked specifically about watching *Seinfeld*:

> Those shows don't have much meaning for me except to make me laugh, I could have had a really horrible day, and I come home and I sit down and I turn on *Seinfeld* in the evening and I'll just be crying, I'll be laughing so hard. And even the bad ones are funny . . . talk about an escape from reality, you don't really think about anything else when you're watching those shows because there's always something happening and you can relax and unwind to those shows.

Not only did the participants report watching television, especially situation comedies, to relax and be entertained, but they also reported that they watched television to escape from their daily and often stressful lives. Many of the participants used the words, "unwind," "relax," "entertain," and "escape" interchangeably to describe their television viewing experience.

Form of Escape

Eighty-three percent of the younger participants and 33% of the older participants reported watching television because it provided an escape from reality (see Table 14). These participants reported watching television to escape from academic, personal and professional problems and stresses. The most popular programs that the participants reported watching to escape included daytime talk shows and daytime and evening soap operas including *Beverly Hills, 90210* and *Melrose Place*.

Amelia, a younger participant, reported that she used television to avoid dealing with personal responsibilities and problems. In the

following passage, Amelia indicated that television viewing reminded her of being home with her mother and created a sense of security for her; and, in turn, it gave her permission to avoid dealing with stressful situations:

> I think that . . . I use television as a diversion (pause) . . . It depends on the times in my life, if something's bothering me like I said, I'll watch more television (softly) than normal . . . It kind of takes me away from what's going on around me. If something bad is going on it puts me in a good mood immediately . . . I just watch one of my favorite shows and it just puts me in a better mood and I feel better . . . it's like an escape . . . that's just my way of dealing, maybe because it reminds me of being home and it reminds me of being (voice lowers) [with] my mom or whatever, but, that's just my way of (voice softens to a whisper) dealing with it.

Linda, an older participant, reported that she used television to escape from inactivity, quietness and personal problems:

> I think I've become uncomfortable with inactivity and with quietness, I don't know how to deal with just the sound of nothing, the sound of quietness and so [television] fills in that void and I've become dependent on that because I think at times maybe it helps you to skirt issues that maybe (pause) in my own life, I need to deal with, so in being focused on the television I don't have to think about the issues that I should be dealing with. And I'm aware of doing that at times, (softly) I'm really aware of doing that. (pause) Also, by watching the news, by watching other people's problems, by watching what's going on in the world, it (pause) takes my thoughts away from what's going on in my personal life, removes me from that. So I don't have to deal with situations.

Beth, a younger participant, reported that she used television to escape from thinking and interacting with people:

> I think I used TV as a way of (pause) ignoring people, or escaping, (pause) you didn't have to think when you watched TV, [you] just kind

of do nothing. Didn't have to use your imagination or (pause, whispers) do anything actually, and that was nice.

Frances, a younger participant, reported that watching television allowed her to take a break from life:

> It's kind of like a getaway from everything else. [You] totally forget once you're watching TV who you are, where you are, that you're sitting in your living room, it's like you're just so zoned in on that it's like a getaway from everything else . . . need a break from life, (laugh) here try the TV . . . it's like nothing else [is] around you. If you're happy or sad . . . just turn on the TV and you forget about it.

Gabriella, a younger participant, expressed how unrealistic and far fetched soap operas were but reported that she enjoyed watching them because she liked watching other people's problems. She said that watching soap operas was a form of escape for her:

> It's the same story lines over and over again with a little twist each time. All the soaps have them. Someone has a brain tumor, someone was in a car accident, paralyzed, someone that they thought was dead has miraculously come back from the grave . . . it's the same story lines over and over again . . . And love triangles, that's a big one . . . And there's always a murder trial, there's always a rape trial, and there's always some kind of custody trial and (voice rises) the one thing that I can never figure out [is] why they get married so much. Someone is always getting married, and it lasts usually at best, two years, something happens to dissolve the marriage and they get a divorce, but they're always still friends . . . Sometimes they even get remarried. (long pause, laughs) That's why I have to laugh at these things because (laughing, in a very soft voice) it doesn't happen all that often. I think it's funny, that's why I think it's a nice little escape from reality (whispering) because . . . it would be kind of good if things did happen this way, you know?

Diane, an older participant, reported that she used television to escape (as well as unwind) from a long day. She equated watching television to taking a bath:

> I think sometimes it's an escape . . . if you've had a long day, and you want to kind of (pause) get away from it all, (softly) instead of taking that Calgon bath, it's just kind of like you get into it through the TV. (voice rises) And I guess that's kind of why I feel sometimes it is like a boob tube. Because you don't really have to use a hell of a lot of creativity or intelligence to be a part of a lot of the shows that are on today. They're really kind of stupid. (pause) I also wonder why I even watch a lot of what I watch but it is entertaining . . . So a lot of times when I tune into TV, (pause) the meaning is . . . instead of taking a bath, you just kind of spread out on the couch (pause) and you unwind after a long day.

It appeared that 83% of the participants used television to avoid stressful situations whether it be work, people, or life in general. These women indicated that television provided an escape from reality because they did not have to think while watching television. In addition, the older participants appeared to be apologetic for watching television to escape.

Source of Companionship

Eighty-three percent of the older participants and 33% of the younger participants reported watching television because the experience provided a source of companionship for them (see Table 14). These women reported that hearing the voices on television, whether they actively watched television or not, made them feel less lonely when they were by themselves.

Helen, an older participant, reported that she missed the noises in her house that were generated by her family when she was a child. At the time of this study, Helen said she was often alone in her home and turned on the television to fill the house with voices:

> I could turn the TV on and vacuum the house . . . and the TV's in the other room, and I'll turn it up so at least I'm listening to somebody . . . Maybe it's just the fact that there's voices in the house . . . it's nice to know that when it's quiet in the house and you want to hear other voices, (pause) it's . . . there to listen to . . . It's just (pause) almost like the companionship . . . (pause) makes it feel like there is someone there with you . . . [I am] so used to having so many people in the house growing up that (pause, voice softens) you miss it when it's not there.

Linda, an older participant, reported that during the period of her life that she did not work and was home alone, television provided companionship for her:

> As my children got older I started to work again, I was out of the house for a long time, and then (pause) I remarried . . . and [I] was home from '84 until two years ago, and in that period of time (pause) before having another child, (pause) I would just put the television on during the day hours just for company in the house.

Marie, an older participant, lived alone and reported that when she was alone in her apartment she used television as a source of companionship:

> It sort of [is] background noise. And I think a lot of times the reason I do that it's not so much that I want to listen to the story or anything, it's not so much that, I think because I live alone I put it on sort of as company. It's other noise, it's other people making noise somewhere in the apartment . . . who else is going to entertain you at dinner time . . . So, it's kind of like having company over . . . the equivalent of a lonely person having company (laughs).

Amelia, a younger participant, indicated that she often missed her family and did not like being alone; as a remedy, she would turn on the television when she felt homesick or lonely:

> I'm not used to being alone because . . . my mother never worked until I was in high school so she was always home . . . I'm not used to walking into an empty apartment, I'm not used to (pause) sitting around by myself, (pause) I like being around people, my family, and (pause) if (pause) they're not around I put the TV on and that's people . . . I always have the TV on, (whispers to herself) I don't know why, even if I have the volume really low, it makes me feel like there's people there, (long pause, very softly) when I'm home alone.

Janet, an older participant, reported that television often brought people to her when she was unable to be with people. She described a related experience she had with television while she was on vacation:

> I was up in [a neighboring state], and (pause) I was alone in the house for about seven hours, and it was a house that I didn't know, and there was basically a TV, or a stereo, and I had the stereo on for a while and then I had the TV on for a while and then I turned both of them off. And it was (pause) a pretty weird feeling because the house at that point got really quiet, and it was up to me then to make noises if I was going to hear any. (pause) It was almost like I wasn't there, like I needed the TV, (pause) like TV brings people into this space that I'm in, and without the TV on . . . it's like, do I exist? It was kind of a really weird, quiet feeling. Does anybody know I'm here?

In addition, Janet reported that she often turned on the television for companionship and to drown out alarming noises when she was home alone:

> I still will put the TV on occasionally just for companionship, whether I'm watching it or not . . . [and when] I'm home alone . . . it's a

distraction . . . I may not hear low level sounds that if the TV wasn't on . . . might (pause) make me become alarmed.

The findings suggested that 83% of the older participants and 33% of the younger participants watched or listened to the television because it provided company for them, filled their homes with voices, and drowned out alarming noises. It is important to note that the majority of the older participants reported turning on the television for this reason as opposed to the younger participants.

Way to Socialize and Feel Connected to People

Sixty-seven percent of the older participants and 50% of the younger participants reported watching television because it provided an excuse to spend time with people that they cared about or because watching television made them feel connected with people in general (see Table 14).

Gabriella, a younger participant, reported that she and her boyfriend declared Sunday night "TV Night." According to Gabriella, this meant that every Sunday night she and her boyfriend would get together and watch a series of science fiction programs:

> Sunday night that's our TV Night, I go over my boyfriend's house and we watch *Star Trek: Next Generation* and *Deep Space Nine* that's another spin-off from *Star Trek*, and then *SeaQuest*. *SeaQuest* is kind of like *Star Trek* only it's under the sea . . . (pause, softly to herself) but that's our TV date (laughs). We have TV and pizza . . . that's the one night that I know I can count on to see him (pause) and even though we don't talk while we're watching it, [we] make little side comments, (whispers) "Oh wow, did you see that, did you hear what he said?" You know, things like that. Or we laugh at the funny parts and I mean there's not really meaningful conversation going on, but it's just (pause)

> something that brings us together because it's something we're both interested in, and we share the time watching it. And (pause) . . . *Seinfeld* is another one, he usually tapes that because neither of us [are] home to watch it.

Kate, a younger participant, reported that watching television gave her and her roommates the opportunity to spend time together and through this experience she realized the closeness that she felt for her friends:

> It's been a time that we've spent together that we may not think is important, but it is because especially now I find when we first got here . . . I think we were closer and . . . now it's like we all have so much other things going on that (pause) going in front of the TV and spending that time is probably the only time that we have where we're all together as like friends, like roommates. And we will sit there and talk and (pause) it gives us that opportunity to find out what's going on with each other. It's not necessarily that we watch TV, it's the fact that [we] planned out that, okay we're going to watch TV, but it leads us into other things about ourselves . . . (pause) I find that (pause) when we [are selecting programs to watch] . . . we all watch the same kind of [shows], it makes me realize how alike we are -- our interests, our beliefs, what we find funny. (pause) It's like my time to realize that these are really close friends because of these common interests that we have . . . it's our time to do something together that we might not be able to do otherwise.

Also, Ellen, a younger participant, reported that television gave her the opportunity to spend time with her friends. She discussed *Beverly Hills, 90210* and *Melrose Place* to illustrate her point:

> Most of the shows I watch, my friends watch. (pause) And sometimes it's just a nice, like Wednesday night, because [of] my schedule. It's a nice time to sit down with my friend and just watch TV, and just sit there and relax and eat dinner and (pause) and that's kind of a way to just bring us together . . . we both know that we're (pause) going to be there at Wednesday night at 8 o'clock to watch *90210* and *Melrose* and . . . I look forward to that, knowing that I'm so busy but I know that [those] (pause) two hours I'm just spending with that person.

In addition, Ellen reported that she used television to communicate and connect with her father:

> I know watching with my dad, (pause) was just more of a together thing. And as I got older . . . I didn't have a lot in common with my dad to talk about, because as a kid . . . I could watch sports all the time and we could always talk about, "Oh, did you see that game?" and we'd watch it together and that was the fun thing. But, when I got into high school I didn't do that as much anymore, so (pause) we kind of lost that . . . I didn't talk to him a lot so we connect[ed] through television. And even though I couldn't talk to him about other things in high school, I'd still come home and say, "Hey, did you see that Celtics game?" and he'd say, (voice rises) "Oh yeah, Celtics this and that," so it was a way to communicate. Now it's much different because (pause) I'll call him up and say, "Hey Dad, Pavarotti's on A&E." So, the meaning with that [is] it's still a together thing, it's still a way to communicate to him because . . . it's nice to share the same things and . . . it's togetherness, (pause, whispers) I know that sounds corny . . . but (pause) when I say, "Hey, Pavarotti's on" . . . it's a way to still stay connected with him . . . that's what television creates for us.

Janet, an older participant, reported using television as an excuse to spend time with her fiancé:

> We worked such crazy schedules but . . . there was a point when *Studs* was on . . . and we'd always have to be [together] for *Studs* . . . I think in part it was a good way to say, "All right, stop what you're doing this is our time."

Diane, an older participant, reported that watching television news, the Olympics and *Rescue 911* made her feel connected to people in general because many times these shows positively portrayed the human race:

> There's just not so many opportunities anymore in this world of ours to feel good about the human race. And so once in a while when that rare moment comes on TV, whether it's in the form of the Olympics or *Rescue 911* where a child gets saved, it just chokes me up. I mean, if you think about it, you go to work, you deal with a lot of angry,

> stressed out people, you drive on the highway (pause) the byway, the whatever way and you get the finger because someone's cutting you off and it's just like (pause) human nature many days just doesn't seem that great. I mean people just don't really know their neighbors anymore, there's no sense of community. Even when I go to church, I mean, I don't know anybody there. I go to church every Sunday, I try to get there every Sunday, and it's like (laughs) I don't know these people. It's not like the old days when you knew everybody in town or you knew everybody in your church. It's not like that anymore. So when I turn on the TV (pause) it connects me to people. (pause) Not necessarily in a community sense, but maybe the local news does that, but more in the whole human race, and when I see nice things happening on TV it does choke me up because you don't often see that. You don't often experience that anymore.

The findings suggest that 67% of the older participants and 50% of the younger participants used television as a vehicle to spend time with people that they cared for as well as to feel connected to people in general. The former was a stronger theme than the latter and was achieved by viewing television programs that both parties enjoyed watching. The latter was achieved by selecting television programs that focused on positive portrayals of people.

Relief from Boredom

Fifty percent of the younger participants and 33% of the older participants reported watching television because it provided a relief from boredom (see Table 14). It appeared that these women reported watching television to fill time rather than engaging in other activities such as reading, studying, socializing and exercising.

Amelia, a younger participant, reported that she watched television because there was nothing else to do:

> If there's nothing else to do and I'm just sitting there watching TV, I'm kind of thinking why am I here? Why am I watching TV? I don't want to watch this program. What else can I do? Nothing. Okay so I'll just sit here and watch TV . . . I often watch things repetitively. I'll watch the same movie over and over and over and over until I know all the words to most of the movies I have. Just last night (pause) I did my homework . . . and I put a movie on that I've seen a (emphasized) million times and (pause) just sat there and kind of watched it . . . (voice rises) It's kind of like the same way with clothes you have, (voice gradually gets softer) a favorite sweater that you always wear, or you have a favorite song that you listen to, or you have a favorite movie, you have a favorite program, (softly) have a favorite food . . . (long pause) there's nothing to do and that's what I do and there's nothing to do most of the time (laughs) so that's what I do.

Kate, a younger participant, reported that watching television relieved her boredom. In addition, she reported, with some disappointment, that she probably could not live without television:

> As far as its meaning to my life, (pause) I guess it's something I can't live without. If you told me that one weekend you can't watch TV all weekend, I think that I would go nuts because I would be like well, what do I have to do? And it's kind of bad that I have to depend on the television when I'm bored or (laughs) when I have nothing better to do, I turn it on, but I think that's its meaning to me, it's something that (pause) I have to have so that in time of boredom or (pause) when there's nothing else to do it gives me something to do . . . I think I would be so bored without it. There's times where it's just there and you turn it on and that's it . . . And (pause) I don't think I could give it up, I really don't.

Helen, an older participant, reported that she watched television when she was bored because she lived in a rural area that lended itself to few activities:

> I guess it's a friendly relationship, because (pause) when you're bored, it's something for you to do . . . (pause) To say that TV has been like a friend to me, that sounds kind of weird, but, it's (pause) been a source

> of not time wasting, but . . . where I lived there was nothing better to do.

The findings indicated that 50% of the younger participants and 33% of the older participants watched television to fill time and to relieve boredom. The data indicated that many of these women relied on television to relieve boredom rather than participating in activities such as reading, listening to music, socializing and exercising.

Viewing Positive Portrayals of People

Thirty-three percent of the younger participants and 17% of the older participants reported watching television because they liked to see people depicted as heroes and rewarded for their positive behavior (see Table 14). The three television programs that the participants identified as accentuating the positive and showing heroic acts were *Rescue 911*, *Cops* and *America's Most Wanted*. In addition, the participants reported that they liked watching these types of programs because they had a purpose.

Beth, a younger participant, explained that she liked watching *America's Most Wanted* and *Rescue 911* because they were real and had a constructive purpose:

> [*America's Most Wanted*] has a purpose of finding criminals that have hurt people or could be dangerous to society . . . I like watching those because (pause) they're real . . . the problems. The bad crime, the issues, it's happened or it will happen or (very long period of silence) it's like even on *911* they show you what to do and what not to do in certain circumstances.

Frances, a younger participant, reported that she liked watching *America's Most Wanted* and *Cops* because these programs focused on criminals getting caught and on positive portrayals of police officers:

> I think [*America's Most Wanted* is] a really good show because . . . it's actually doing something, they're actually catching real crooks and murderers and I think it's . . . a show that's actually helping society in general because so many people watch TV and so many people watch that show . . . I think TV works better than just the cops actually looking for people because sometimes they're in remote areas and TV reaches remote areas . . . I just think it's really good in that aspect because it's helping out. Not very many shows do that . . . With *Cops* . . . they're actually catching these people. And I think with all of the bad stuff about cops like with . . . Rodney King . . . that this show kind of makes people look up to cops more. They see what they have to go through . . . (pause) you don't really think about what they go through every day, what they have to put up with. I think it helps them get a lot of respect from citizens. A lot of times they'll show a guy who got some kind of reward for bravery and . . . I think it helps police officers.

Diane, an older participant, reported that she liked to watch *Rescue 911* because the program accentuated the positive and portrayed people as heroes:

> I like shows that have a happy ending . . . when there's a happy ending and everything's turned out all right, it almost brings tears to my eyes, you know, and a lump in my throat to think that there's so many caring people that would come (pause) to the rescue . . . this world is so violent and so full of drugs and you [are] always hearing the bad, I think that show glorifies the good. And it brings out the hero, and I really think that's important and necessary . . . it's really important to (pause) accentuate the positive.

Frances reported that she liked to watch *Rescue 911* for the same reasons as Diane:

> I like *Rescue 911* just because (pause) the name rescue, I mean that's the name of it, they're helping people, they're saving people who are (pause) in bad situations and they're being helped . . . and the person ends up living and being grateful and then afterward they show that person and that person hugging the person that saved them and [imitates voice of person that was rescued], "I'll remember this person for the rest of my life, they're my friend, they'll always be in my heart." It's usually got a good ending to it.

The findings revealed that 33% of the younger participants and 17% of the older participants liked to watch programs like *America's Most Wanted* and *Rescue 911* because they were real, they had a purpose, which was arresting criminals and saving people, and they positively depicted professionals and people in general. In addition, the participants indicated that they liked watching these types of television programs because they often counteracted the negative portrayals of violence and crime found on other television programs, especially television news.

Source of Comfort and Consistency

Thirty-three percent of the younger participants and 17% of the older participants reported watching television because it provided a source of comfort and consistency for them. They reported that long-standing television programs like *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and *Cheers* were reliable and had familiar characters and personalities.

Amelia, a younger participant, reported, to her friends' disbelief, that she always had the television on whether she watched it or not because she found comfort in the experience:

> My friends can not believe how much television I watch . . . they can not believe it . . . I couldn't even put in hours how many I watch, I just

> watch it (emphasis) all the time . . . if I don't have to be somewhere, [if] I'm not working or if . . . I don't have really important work to do, I'm watching television . . . I just enjoy watching television. I find comfort in watching television . . . I wake up in the morning and turn on the TV whether I watch it or not . . . I have to have it on, it just (softly) comforts me.

In addition, Amelia reported that watching a long-standing television program such as *The Oprah Winfrey Show* provided security for her because Winfrey was a familiar and constant person in her life:

> It's familiar I guess because no matter what I do in my life, or no matter where I am, *Oprah* is always on channel 7 (laughs). I guess that's a way of thinking of it. (pause) I remember watching *Oprah* when I was fifteen [years old] and *Oprah* is still there. (laughing) She's skinnier now, but she's still there. And (pause) I guess that's a constant in my life (laughs). So, (pause) the same shows, the same episodes . . . (pause, softly) same channel, same time, same everything . . . so I know that it's always going to be on . . . no matter where I am or what I'm doing it's always on . . . So when [I] say I find comfort in it, maybe because it's something that doesn't change. (long pause, softly) I don't deal with change very well (laughs). So, I guess that's a constant.

Ellen, a younger participant, also indicated that watching long-standing television programs provided a sense of comfort for her because she became familiar with the programs' characters and could rely on them to be there week after week. She discussed her disappointment over the cancellation of *Cheers* to illustrate her point:

> I literally grew up with *Cheers*. I [watched *Cheers*] from [when] they started in '85, so I was fourteen, fifteen years old . . . Everybody thinks I was nuts, because they're like "it is a show" . . . but I couldn't believe it was going off the air. It was like how could *Cheers* do it? After all these years of watching them, how could they go off the air? I was so familiar with every Thursday at nine o'clock, for eight, nine, ten years . . . watching *Cheers*. And I was used to their humor, used to the writing, it almost threw my schedule off because I was used to that and

it was like a friend of mine had left. (pause) And it sounds ridiculous that you can get so attached to a show, but you can because these seven characters . . . I knew and I could count on to be the same people they were last week, and they'd be in the same place at the same time.

Diane, an older participant, also discussed her experience with the cancellation of *Cheers*:

I felt bad. And of course I tuned in for the big finale. (pause) And not that I was a part of the family, some people (pause, voice lowers) have said that they felt like part of the family, (voice rises) I didn't feel like a part of the whole thing, but it was just, it was old reliable, you always knew Thursday at nine [o'clock] it would be on. They didn't screw you around with putting it on different days and different channels and different times, it was always there it was always the same time and the same date, and (pause) I knew I could tune in and always see the same characters . . . they truly enjoyed working together and you could feel it.

The findings indicated that 33% of the younger participants and 17% of the older participants found comfort watching long-standing television personalities and programs because they provided consistency in their lives. It appears that the common variable surrounding the viewing of long-standing programs is consistency--the same characters, the same night, the same time, and the same channel. Many of the participants reported that they did not like change.

Summary

The participants of this study reported watching television for a variety of reasons, including to learn and be informed, to relax and be entertained, and to escape. In addition, the participants reported that

watching and listening to television provided a source of companionship, a way to socialize and feel connected with people, and provided a relief from boredom. Also, these women reported watching television because it gave them the opportunity to view positive portrayals of people and it provided a source of comfort and consistency for them. The television programs that reportedly fulfilled these needs included situation comedies, television news including local, national and evening news magazines, made-for-television movies, educational programming including PBS, the Discovery Channel and the Arts & Entertainment Network, drama including police and rescue shows, day time and evening soap operas, and day time talk shows.

Watching Television With Their Families or Watching Alone

This section reports on watching television alone. The study found that 67% of the participants reported that they rarely watched television with their families. The same number of younger and older participants reported this finding (see Table 16). In addition, 75% of the participants said that they often watched television alone. It appeared that there were two reasons why these women watched television without their families or alone: they had more than one television in their homes which enabled multiple viewing and by watching alone they could have control over what they watched.

Amelia, a younger participant, reported that while growing up she seldom watched television with her family and preferred to watch television alone. Also, she stated that as a young adolescent, she had at least three television sets in her home:

> Yeah . . . we've got two rooms, one room is the family room, [it] has the big TV, and then we have another room. (pause) My parents' room [has] another TV, and we have cable in both rooms and VCR's in both rooms . . . I have a TV in my room . . . We never sit down as a family and watch TV, it's not a family thing . . . (softly) No, never (laughs).

Amelia also reported that when she went away to college she still preferred watching television by herself:

> I had a TV in my room at college and we had a TV in the living room, but I liked to be by myself and watch what I want to watch, I don't like to watch what other people want to watch.

Table 16
The Number of Participants Who Often Watched Television without Their Families or Alone

	Age of the Participant		
	Younger 18-23 Years Old	Older 30-45 Years Old	Total Number
Often Watched Without Families	4	4	8
Often Watched Television Alone	4	5	9
n=12			

Helen, an older participant, reported that she preferred watching television alone because then she did not feel obligated to please other viewers:

> I don't feel like I have to turn the channel to please somebody else if I want to sit and watch something stupid I will, and not be (pause) crucified, but like you know, (imitates another person's reaction to what she's watching) "Come on, what are you watching that for?" If I want to watch it, I want to watch it, whatever it is . . . (pause) I don't know, it's [a] comfortable feeling when you can just sit down and there's nobody home and watch what you want.

Beth, a younger participant, reported that her parents bought her a television for her bedroom when she was in middle school. She reported that watching television in her bedroom was both an isolating and harmful experience. She indicated that she regretted watching television alone rather than spending time with her father:

> I think I wanted to be alone so that's why I got a TV. Instead of sitting in my room writing letters, they gave me a TV to watch. (pause) It separated me from my parents and my family. The only time I saw them was when I went to the bathroom (laughs), [or] I got something to eat. (pause) I just (pause) thought it was normal. (very long period of silence) It's not . . . I just think it had a harmful effect . . . [it created] lack of communication. [I] spent more time watching TV than anything else. (long period of silence) I liked to play cards, play games . . . [and I] probably would have [done] more of that that included my father . . . (long period of silence) I just think it has a detrimental effect on families, in general.

Both Frances and Kate, younger participants, reported that watching television was not a family activity. Diane, an older participant, shared her childhood experience of watching television without her family:

> I don't ever remember watching TV with my mother or father. (pause) I remember watching a lot of TV by myself, and I didn't have a TV in my room (pause) so I guess I was just downstairs by myself watching it.

Irene, an older participant, reported that she seldom watched television with her husband, a behavior she described as unfortunate:

> I just know that we don't like the same TV viewing and this is unfortunate because we don't watch TV together. It's bad we don't spend enough time together as it is . . . so I think it's sad that a husband and wife can't sit down and watch TV.

Linda, an older participant, discussed her experience with watching television without her husband and the effect it had on her seven-year-old daughter:

> The fact that I'm watching in another room, my husband's watching in the family room, (pause) we're not drawn together so we don't have that feeling of closeness, you have less to talk about because . . . (pause) we each have our own separate experience with television . . . so we don't have a common subject to talk about . . . he doesn't talk about work, or I'm not talking about school, but if there's a program that's really of interest, that in turn will get us talking and then that in turn will lead off to the side subjects such as how it might pertain to work or a course that I've taken. But without that, without that kind of common ground, (pause) it isolates us from each other so I find we don't talk as much, we don't share interests as much . . . (long pause) And my daughter chooses. If I'm in there watching television, she'll run up to see if I'm watching and then she'll run back to see what daddy's watching, and, (pause) she's either with one parent [or] the other and . . . (pause, voice rises) it doesn't give her a real positive (pause, voice softens) image of how a family should spend time together.

The findings suggested two things: either the participants (67%) seldom watched television with their families and felt badly about it or they (75%) often watched television alone because they wanted to control what they watched. However, the findings showed a difference between the younger and older participants in relation to viewing television as a family. Three out of the four older participants who reported that they

seldom watched television with spouses and children as much as they would like also reported that when they were children they frequently watched television with their families, which they reported were happy times. This finding was not found among the younger participants. Two of the older participants fondly described their childhood family television viewing experiences.

Helen enthusiastically spoke about her childhood experience of getting ready for and watching *The Wonderful World of Disney* with her three siblings:

> I was always the last one [in the] bath because I was youngest and . . . my mother had to bathe me . . . and it usually started right after dinner, 5:30 or so, we always ate early because I was in bed by 7:30 I think, except on Sunday nights . . . I don't remember what time *Disney* came on, I think it might have been 7 on Sunday, (pause) but I don't remember . . . (pause) It was nice, I think about it now . . . (pause) I just remember the anxiety, oh my God hurry up take my bath, and then just to be able to sit down and watch whatever it was, but . . . as soon as the [*Disney*] music would come on for the show it was like we'd all just sit there, everybody had to be quiet, but it took a long time to get there (laughs). And then if anybody had anything to say they had to wait until a commercial would come on . . . (long pause) I don't remember when it was that we all stopped watching together.

Irene nostalgically described her childhood experience watching the *Twilight Zone* with her extended family:

> I loved (stressed) the *Twilight Zone*. Friday night was a big night for me and my family . . . I watched that with my four siblings and then my five cousins, we always got together on Friday. The audience itself, you know it just made the show more entertaining because you had such a large audience saying "what happened," and "what's going on," and "didn't we see him once before" and, so we really looked forward to the *Twilight Zone* on Friday night . . . we had one TV and one living room and that's where we all congregated, and we looked forward to it . . . We all knew that after the end of the day that's where you're going to find everybody. And we loved it cause we could talk

among each other and you know [during the] commercial, what did you think and so on and so forth. So for the most part, to this day, I don't mind watching a good movie with a couple of people who I enjoy being with, because you can discuss it during the commercial break . . . I think we miss a lot of that today.

The findings showed that 67% of the participants in this study reported that they did not watch television with their families as much as they would have liked to and 75% of the participants reported watching television alone because they liked to have greater control over what they watched and did not want to feel obligated to please other viewers. Three out of the four older participants who reported that they frequently watched television with their families reported that when they were children, television viewing was a family activity.

Control Over Viewing

The following section reports on ways in which the participants reported taking control over their television viewing. Eighty-three percent of the older participants felt that they had some control over whether or not to watch negative images on television, especially the negative portrayals of women on television. None of the younger participants discussed this issue. The older participants reported that the most common ways to control their television viewing was by shutting off the television, changing the channel, and encouraging other women to take an active stand against the negative images of women on television. It appeared that their desire to control their television viewing was motivated by anger. All of the women cited below are older participants.

Irene talked about an early experience of canceling a cable television subscription because she found the programming offensive:

> I think in the later 70's maybe early 80's, (pause) we finally bought our first house and we got excited with everything we could buy, we had less money in the bank, but we owned a house, so (pause) we purchased [WXX] . . . it was a movie channel, like HBO . . . but what happened was . . . they began to have after hour movies . . . and the movies were (pause) really seedy movies, really X-rated. And I suppose being a young person and not really being exposed to that kind of (pause) movie I laughed and enjoyed it at the beginning . . . (voice rises) But (pause) then, overnight, that seemed to become a real irritant, (voice softens to a whisper) because my first thought was always women, and this isn't right. I wasn't comfortable with it, and so I called up one day . . . and I asked to take the [WXX] out of the house and they . . . wanted to know my reason, so I really didn't want to say it at first, but then I figured what the hell, (pause) maybe my phone call . . . with other people['s] [phone calls] will change the world, (pause) so I (pause) told them. I said, "When I purchased this selection of movies I did not know that I was going to get a lot of nudity and I did not agree with this kind of nudity in my home." . . . Now, it's easy to turn it off, (pause) but I wanted to do more than that, so I had to call up the station and say I want to cancel it, because then it meant their pocket, and I wanted to hurt them in one way or another.

Diane stated that she no longer watched MTV because of its focus on violence, especially violence against women:

> I don't know what happened to MTV, the meaning I'm creating out of it is that money became a prime part of the problem, I really think money is the root of all evil because all of the sudden the music was no longer pleasurable, the music (laughs) was more of this rap, police killing, shoot 'em up, blood and guts, swearing type of crap, it's not even music . . . It also became, I feel, much more demeaning to women. Women are always dressed in next to nothing. They're practically being raped on top of hoods of cars or doing things that women should not be doing. And it's all in the name of entertainment? I don't put MTV on ever, ever!

Helen reported that she controlled her television viewing by choosing alternative programming or shutting off the television:

> As a viewer, [I] have the power to make or break a television show. And if you're like, (spiteful) "Heh, I'm, not watching that, I hope it goes off the air!" That's great . . . because if I think it's stupid, I hope a lot of other people think it's stupid too, maybe they'll get rid of it. Click [sound of the television remote control]-- that's it, (softly) the power.

Marie reported that she too took control over her viewing by turning off the television. In addition, she wished that when she turned off the television she could send a message to television producers expressing her anger about the poor quality of programming:

> I wish we could send a message, I wish our TV's were hooked up [so] that they could get the message that I'm not going to watch this, I'm going to turn this off and read a book because it's better than this crap, or I'm going to turn this off and go write (laughs) because I can do better than this.

Irene talked in-depth about the negative depiction of women on television (see more about the negative depiction of women in Chapter VI) and encouraged female viewers to recognize these images:

> First of all, women (pause) can only come as [far] as they want to, individually, (pause) for their own personal growth. However, in the real world . . . they still don't (stressed) have that recognition that they deserve (voice softens) as a human being . . . not as a commodity, not as an object, not as a selling point. This is where women haven't grown at all . . . (voice rises) All I'm saying is that women can do just [as much] as men, anything that they want, as long as they allow themselves to be respected. Not only by other people, but by themselves first. If you . . . look in the mirror and you're happy with what you're doing and what you feel and what you believe about yourself, then okay, life is working well for you. But if there's that

grain of (pause) of discomfort because you feel you're not getting a fair shake, well investigate it.

Linda encouraged female viewers to band together and speak out against the negative depiction of women on television:

> There's been a real down slope in (pause) the amount of (long pause) respect for women. (long period of silence) I guess in order for that to happen . . . there has to be some sort of male hierarchy that recognizes that women are in their own right very powerful, in order to have such a mass effort to (pause) degrade them. (long period of silence) So in force, or in a group (pause) if women . . . band together, they'd be really powerful in terms of . . . changing television . . . And (pause) I think people don't realize that you can have a say in what is presented on television. I think everyone turns on television with the feeling that they have no choice, it's out of their hands, but (pause) I think if people banded together and did a little bit more we'd have the power (voice softens) to really change this.

The data showed that the 83% of older participants felt that they had control over whether or not to watch negative images on television. They reported controlling their viewing by turning off the television, changing the channel, canceling cable television subscriptions, and encouraging other women to take an active stand against the negative portrayals of women on television. It was interesting to note that the younger participants did not discuss this issue.

Reading and Studying in Relation to Watching Television

The following section will report on reading and studying in relation to television viewing. The findings show that cognitive skills and activities were negatively influenced by television viewing. For example,

forty-two percent of the participants reported that television viewing either negatively affected the amount of time they read or the amount of time they read to their children (see Table 17). In addition, 42% percent of the participants reported watching television while they were doing their homework and believed that their studies were negatively affected by the experience (see Table 18).

Table 17
Television Viewing Negatively Influenced Time Spent Reading

	Age of the Participant		
	Younger 18-23 Years Old	Older 30-45 Years Old	Total Number
Television Viewing Negatively Influenced Time Spent Reading	3	2	5
n=12			

Beth, a younger participant, reported that she would have read more often as a child if she had not watched as much television:

> If I wasn't watching TV I probably would have been (pause) reading or doing something more constructive.

Ellen, a younger participant, reported that she had difficulty reading as a child and turned to television as an alternate activity:

I think if I didn't watch television so much I would have read, but I hate to read, so that's one reason why I watch television a lot . . . I also had problems with comprehension. So, I would watch TV.

Table 18
Television Viewing
and Its Negative Effect on Homework

	Age of the Participant		
	Younger 18-23 Years Old	Older 30-45 Years Old	Total Number
Television Viewing Negatively Affected Homework	3	2	5
n=12			

Irene, an older participant, said that she depended on television as an educational tool and reported that she regretted not reading more often to her children. Below she refers to *Sesame Street*:

> I wished I would have read more to my kids when they were growing up . . . But I depended on that TV a lot.

Linda, an older participant, reported that she was worried about her daughter because reading a book did not hold her attention as much as watching television:

> It scares me in some respects that (pause) the television has taken over so much of our lives, (softly) and it worries me about my child. (pause) Reading a book, to her, doesn't have the same interest as watching TV . . . I grew up with books . . . so it [is] very different. It's a scary feeling.

Frances, a younger participant, reported that, at the time of this study, watching television had negatively affected her studies:

> I slacked off on homework so bad[ly] lately, it's unbelievable. It used to be: (pause) do my homework, get everything done or at least most of it done and then go watch TV. Now it's (voice rises) watch TV! (laughs). [I'm] slacking off so bad[ly], I hate it!

Amelia, a younger participant, reported that she skipped classes to watch television; as a result, she did not graduate on time and was attending her fifth year of college. In addition, Amelia stated that she scheduled her classes around television soap operas. Below, she discussed skipping classes in order to watch *Cheers*:

> Two years ago I had to take a 7:30 to 10:05 [p.m.] journalism class that was a (voice rises and speeds up) requirement and that's the only time they ever offered it, Thursday nights and that's when *Cheers* is on. (laughs) So, (softly) I got a little upset, and I skipped a lot of classes . . . and I notice that (long pause) [my roommates and I] basically sit around, (pause, voice rises) go out, . . . (pause) come home real late, wake up with a hangover and (voice softens) lay down in front of the TV and watch TV all day, [we] don't go to class.

In addition, Amelia explained how watching television negatively affected her studies:

> There's just a (emphasized) thousand other things I could do . . . I could never turn on the TV and always be busy doing something for school (short period of silence) but . . . unless I'm forced by a serious

> deadline to do something, I will not do it before it's due. I had a paper due today . . . [I] could have done it all last week, and it would have been an A paper. I did it yesterday and today, it's probably a C or a D paper, but (pause) I chose not to, I chose to do other things, and I should have logged how many hours of TV I watched last week, I'm sure it was a lot.

The data indicated that watching television negatively influenced the amount of time the participants read or read to their children. Also, the data showed that 50% of the younger participants felt that their television viewing negatively influenced the amount of time they spent reading and negatively affected their study habits.

Eating and Television Viewing

This section will report on eating while watching television. Eighty-three percent of the participants reported that they ate while watching television. One hundred percent of the younger participants and 67% of the older participants reported this finding (see Table 19). These women reported that they frequently overate while watching television and two of the participants reported that eating while watching television contributed to their weight problem (as children). These women reported that they ate while watching television for three reasons: (1) it was convenient to combine the two activities, (2) it provided a source of comfort, and (3) it provided a relief from boredom.

Table 19
Eating While Watching Television

	Age of the Participant		
	Younger 18-23 Years Old	Older 30-45 Years Old	Total Number
Eating While Watching Television	6	4	10
n=12			

Ellen, a younger participant, reported that she liked to eat while watching television because it provided a source of comfort for her, it fit into her schedule, and it allowed her to eat with people:

> I know from all my nutrition exercise classes you should never eat while you watch TV because you can consume three times as much as you would . . . normally . . . but, like [with] *Melrose Place*, I feel comfortable . . . I always associate eating with being comfortable and settling down or socializing . . . it's kind of nice actually just to sit there and have my dinner and be reintroduced to these characters every week . . . I probably eat more macaroni (laughs) watching that than if I didn't watch that. But, yeah, a lot of things I do are around my eating schedule . . . [when] I'm home alone I like to eat (softly) with people. So, you turn your TV on . . . in the morning, it's *Good Morning America*, I eat breakfast, it's lunch when I['m] watching soaps, and at night it's pasta (laughs) . . . while watching *Beverly Hills* [*90210*] [and] (pause) *Melrose Place*.

Amelia, a younger participant, reported that her experience with watching television always included eating. She, like Ellen, reported that eating while watching television provided her with a sense of comfort and familiarity:

> It would be just me and my mother watching [*Moonlighting*] . . . we'd be eating something and watching TV (laughs) at the same time, (stressed) always . . . My mother's got a cabinet filled with garbage . . .just junk, and (voice rises) after dinner, wait about an hour, go in the cabinet, get something to eat, sit down and watch TV . . . I still do that today. I always have to be eating something [and] watching TV at the same time . . . eating and watching television are almost the same sort of (pause, softly) feeling for me, (pause) they're both kind of comforting . . . it does remind me of being home . . . I'll wake up in the morning, put the TV on, make breakfast . . . I would be eating while I was watching a soap opera. And dinner, I always eat dinner watching TV. By myself or at home, either way, I'm always watching TV while eating.

Gabriella, a younger participant, reported she did not realize how much food she consumed while watching television. Below, she described a television viewing experience with her father and brother:

> The three of us, we'd sit down on the weekends and my father would get his beer and his popcorn or he'd come up with some concoction of food, (softer) he always made up the craziest food to watch with TV . . . You didn't realize how much you ate (laughing) when you were watching TV, just kept shoveling it in. He used to make this big plate of nachos, with the refried beans and the cheese and stuff like that, (whispers kind of to herself) that was always so good. And we'd polish off the whole thing and we'd be like, (whispers) "Where'd that all go?" And then a commercial will come and we'd go and get something else [to eat].

Beth, a younger participant, reported that in high school she would not eat while she was at school but would binge on food and watch television when she came home from school:

> I didn't eat breakfast, so I wouldn't eat in high school, (voice softens to a whisper) I didn't want people to think I ate food. I binged when I got home from school, and watched soap operas until my mother got home.

Kate, a younger participant, reported that television food commercials encouraged her to eat while watching television. In addition, she reported that she ate while watching television because it provided a relief from boredom and was a source of comfort:

> TV makes me want to go eat because there's always commercials about food . . . (laughs) all right, do I eat or do I not? And then I feel guilty because there's a commercial about Jenny Craig . . . [followed by] a commercial for Pizza Hut or something like that. And if I'm hungry, I'm like, "Oh God, I wish I had that!" . . . it makes me want to eat if I'm sitting around watching TV because what else are you going to do? . . . you don't even realize it when you're eating, you're just sitting there eating and eating. (pause) And in a way it's bad because I'm, (pause) distracted . . . I could go through a bag of chips [during] a show and [not] even realize it . . . I do it . . . because I'm bored with what I'm watching or it's just a comforting feeling.

Frances, a younger participant, reported that eating while watching television contributed to her weight problem (as a child). Below, she talked about her experience watching cooking programs and television food commercials:

> Watching TV so much probably [is] what got me so fat . . . Every time you turn on the TV there's some kind of food, whether it's a cooking show, whether it's a commercial for Duncan Hines cake . . . if you have it . . . (snaps fingers) "Oh my God, I have to (laughs) go get it!" . . . Or go to the store and buy it . . . (long pause) That was a pain in the [rear-end], it made it more difficult . . . to lose weight.

Also, Diane, an older participant, reported that eating while watching television contributed to her weight problem (as a child):

> I didn't have a TV in my room (pause) so I guess I was just downstairs by myself watching it. (long pause) And a lot of times I would have something to eat, (voice lowers) that's probably where my eating

> problem (laughs) started. Just sitting in front of the TV eating, passing the time away.

Irene, an older participant, talked about eating while watching the *Twilight Zone* with her family:

> That was great . . . we'd start every Friday night with ice cream cones . . . and from there we'd go to potato chips and pretzels and then the end it was cookies and milk (laughs). That was the *Twilight Zone* thing, cookies and milk . . . (voice rises) I don't know what we enjoyed most now that I think of it (laughing) the snacks or the TV, but we associated the two, because we knew when the *Twilight Zone* [came on] those big cookies were coming out.

The data showed that 100% of the younger participants and 67% of the older participants reported eating while watching television. Many of these women reported that they overate while watching television and reported that television food commercials encouraged them to eat while viewing. In addition, two of these women reported that eating while watching television contributed to their weight problem. The participants reported that eating while watching television was convenient and it provided them with a source of comfort and a relief from boredom.

Chapter Summary

The participants in this study reported watching television for various reasons. The first and most common reason was to learn and be informed. The findings showed that 83% of the participants were eager to learn information through television that was either relevant to their lives or that they did not learn elsewhere. In addition, these women reported

that it was easier and more convenient to learn by watching television than by reading a book. The most popular television programs watched to fulfill this need included: television news and evening news magazines; educational programming; day time talk shows; stand-up comedy; and made-for-television movies.

The second reason the participants watched television was to relax and be entertained. The findings showed that 75% of the participants reported watching television to fulfill this function. The most popular television programs to relax to and be entertained by were situation comedies.

The third reason the participants watched television was to escape from reality. The findings showed that 58% of the participants reported watching television to fulfill this need. These participants reported using television to avoid stressful situations including work, relationships, and life in general. These women indicated that television provided an escape for them because they did not have to think while watching. It is important to note that 71% of the women who reported watching television to escape were younger participants. The most popular television programs watched as a form of escape included daytime talk shows and daytime and evening soap operas.

The fourth reason the participants watched television was that it provided a source of companionship for them. The findings showed that 58% of the participants reported watching television to fulfill this function. The participants reported turning on the television, whether they watched it or not, because it provided company for them, filled their homes with voices, and drowned out alarming noises. It is important to note that 71%

of the women who reported watching television as a source of companionship were older participants.

The fifth reason the participants watched television was that it provided a way to socialize and feel connected to people. The findings showed that 58% of the participants reported watching television to fulfill this need. The participants reported using television as a way to spend time with friends and it appeared that what they "watched" was less important than the time spent with friends. The programs that participants watched to feel connected to people in general included television news, the Olympics, and rescue shows because they often depicted positive portrayals of people.

The sixth reason the participants watched television was to fill time and relieve boredom. The findings showed that 42% of the participants reported watching television to fulfill this need. The data indicated that many of these women watched television to relieve boredom rather than engaging in alternate activities such as reading, listening to music, socializing and exercising.

The seventh reason the participants watched television was that it gave them the opportunity to watch positive portrayals of people. The findings showed that 25% of the participants reported watching television to fulfill this need. These participants liked to watch television programs including *America's Most Wanted* and *Rescue 911* because, in their opinion, these types of programs counteracted the negative portrayals of violence and crime found on other television programs, especially television news.

The eighth and final reason the participants watched television was that it provided a source of comfort and consistency for them. The findings showed that 25% of the participants reported watching television

to fulfill this need. These participants found comfort watching long-standing television programs because they became familiar with the television personalities and characters and counted on watching the same program week after week.

Another finding was that 67% of the participants reported that they rarely watched television with their families and 75% said that they often watched television alone. These findings showed a difference between the younger and older participants in relation to viewing television as a family. Seventy-five percent of the older participants who reported that they did not watch television with their families as adults reported that television viewing was a family activity when they were children. This finding was not found among the younger participants.

Also, the data showed that 83% of older participants felt that they had some control over negative images on television. They reported controlling their television viewing by turning off the television, changing the channel, canceling cable television subscriptions, and encouraging other women to take an active stand against the negative portrayals of women on television (see more about the negative depiction of women in Chapter VI). This issue was not discussed among the younger participants.

Another important finding was that 42% of the participants reported that watching television negatively influenced the amount of time they read or read to their children. In addition, 50% of the younger participants felt that their television viewing negatively affected their study habits.

The last finding showed that 100% of the younger participants and 67% of the older participants reported eating while watching television.

Many of these women reported that they overate while watching television and reported that television food commercials encouraged them to eat while viewing. In addition, two of these women reported that eating while watching television contributed to their weight problem. The participants reported that eating while watching television was convenient and it provided them with a source of comfort and a relief from boredom.

CHAPTER VI

REPORT OF THE DATA: COLLEGE WOMEN'S VIEW OF THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN ON TELEVISION AND THEIR CRITIQUE OF THE TELEVISION MEDIA

This chapter reports on the participants' view of the portrayal of women on television. In addition, this chapter reports on the participants' critique of the television media. These data were gathered from the participants' in-depth interviews.

In order to provide clarity for the reader, each participant's age category is indicated as she is cited. The age categories include the younger participants, ages 18-23, and the older participants, ages 30-45. The specific age of the participant is not included in this chapter unless it is relevant to the finding. In addition, the findings are listed from the most commonly mentioned topic to the least commonly mentioned topic.

Negative Portrayals of Women on Television

The most common theme described by the participants of this study was the negative portrayal of women on television. Some of the participants felt more strongly than others, but 92% of the participants reported that more often than not, women and women's issues were unfavorably portrayed on television (see Table 20). The participants were both angry and offended by the negative portrayals of women on television and felt that television women were most often depicted as "sex

objects," "victims," "stupid," or not at all. The following section reports on the participants' experiences with viewing negative portrayals of women on television and with television programs that focused on women's fears. This discussion is divided into six sections: (1) women's body images; (2) women in commercials; (3) women's issues; (4) women's fears; (5) women in sports; and (6) women in soap operas.

Table 20
Negative Portrayals of Women on Television

Types of Television Programming or Issue	Age of the Participant		
	Younger 18-23 Years Old	Older 30-45 Years Old	Total Number
Negative Portrayals of Women on TV	6	5	11
Women's Body Images	5	4	9
Women in Commercials	4	5	9
Women's Issues	1	4	5
Women's Fears	2	3	5
Women in Sports	1	3	4
Women in Soap Operas	2	2	4
n=12			

Women's Body Images

Seventy-five percent of the participants in this study reported that television focused on women's physical appearances rather than on women's intelligence, talents, abilities, and accomplishments. These participants reported that most women on television were portrayed as young, thin, and beautiful. In addition, the participants reported that the stereotypical images of women on television created and reinforced an unrealistic ideal of how women in our society should look and that the women on television who did not fit this description were not portrayed as having value. Lastly, the younger participants were critical of diet and unhealthy food commercials that accompanied the images of beautiful women on television. The women reported that television was sending contradictory messages.

Forty percent of the younger participants who talked about images of women on television reported that the unrealistic standards of beauty negatively affected their self-esteem. These participants placed the blame for their feelings of inadequacy on female television actresses who met the stereotypical standards of female beauty. Fifty-six percent of all the women who talked about this issue felt that these stereotypical images of women's bodies were dangerous because young females may try to emulate the unrealistic standards of beauty.

Kate, a younger participant, was so angry about the stereotypical images of women on television that she addressed the issue in the first thirty seconds of her first interview. She reported that the body images of women on television were "overwhelming" and made her feel "angry" and "depressed":

I'm not supposed to be talking about it now, but the images that are portrayed on TV of women and what women are supposed to look like . . . the body image thing, my God . . . I remember [being] ten or 11 [years old], and I was so concerned with my weight and still am. I think it reflected a lot by what I saw on TV. I know it wasn't my parents because my parents were always shoving food down my throat (laughs). I know it wasn't them telling me, "Oh, you should be skinny," but that's the messages I got . . . so I think that was from TV . . . It was very overwhelming. It made me depressed in a way . . . I was on (emphasized) diets, starving myself . . . because I wanted to look like that. And it really made me very upset . . . So, I think it put a lot of pressure on me at that time, especially when I was just going through all these changes . . . and now I look back on it and I realize how complicated it was.

Gabriella, a younger participant, was angry that television portrayed women's bodies unrealistically. She reported that the perfect images of women's bodies on television were "unattainable," "unrealistic" and "unhealthy":

It kind of bothers me how (pause) the media portrays how women are supposed to look. They're supposed to have nice full bosoms, and little tiny, tiny waists, and curvy hips and it just doesn't happen like that . . . (pause, begins to laugh) I look at [myself] and I look at them and I'm like that's not fair because men see that and they think that's what a woman should look like, and (pause) I don't want to say this condescending[ly], but real women don't look like that. They're not made to look like that. They're made with a little valley in-between [their breasts] (laughs). They're made (pause) so they get saddle bags. They're made to get a little tummy . . . Real women aren't like that, that's an ideal, that isn't really so attain[able]. Some women are like that naturally, but not many. And that kind of bothers me because . . . (pause, voice softens) that's not healthy. You got these girls that are 5'6" and weigh less than I do. I'm only 5 foot. I weight about 107 pounds and I think I'm pretty proportionate. You get these women who are 5'6" to 5'9" (pause) and weigh 105 pounds. (voicing her concern, very affected by this) That's not healthy.

Frances and Kate, both younger participants, were angry that images of beautiful women on television were juxtaposed with unhealthy food and diet commercials. These women were critical of the contradictory messages on television because they reported that they strived to look like television women but found it difficult to resist eating the fattening foods that were advertised.

Frances, a former model, was the most upset about these contradictory messages:

> You always see skinny people on TV, and you always (voice softens, quickens) [say to yourself] "All right, [I have to] go on a diet . . . I'm going to be skinny, I'm going to be as skinny as her, all right, starting (emphasized) today!" . . . And then there's chocolate cake on the next commercial (laugh). You definitely get angry . . . it pisses me off . . . Or like the will part [of] not wanting to go bake a cake or go get whatever is in the refrigerator, they're showing you on TV over and over and over again, it's so hard and then once you go get [the food that is being advertised on TV], then you get angry at yourself. (pause) That's tough, that's real tough. (pause, deep breath) I think TV plays a bigger role than [I] actually think because you take so much stuff in when you're watching TV. There's so many different things that you see and I don't think it's all on a conscious level, [it is] probably being taken in subconsciously, (long pause) but I get angry. I even do it now (voice gets very soft) when I see somebody really skinny and I start to think, damn it!

Kate reported that the stereotypical images of women on television negatively affected her self-esteem:

> [Television] definitely influenced my own self image and my own self esteem . . . When you're growing up, you see these skinny women, perfect looking or what society views as perfect, but as a child, or as a young woman you think it's perfect because it's on TV . . . so you begin to think well, I have to start changing myself, I have to start losing weight and I have to start dressing this way and I have to spend all this time on making myself perfect because that's what society says is perfect . . . I have very low self esteem and when I see these women

that are perfect, and they're glorified, (pause) it just makes me feel like, oh my God, I don't measure up to that . . . especially on MTV, those women that (laughs) have the big breasts and (pause) perfect [bodies], it just made me feel like I was inadequate, nobody's going to like me because I don't look like that.

Like Kate, Frances believed that the stereotypical images of women on television negatively affected her self-esteem:

I have low self esteem, and . . . any time I saw somebody [skinny] on TV I'd be like, (animated) "God, I want to be just like her, all right that's it I'm going on a diet (stressed) starting right now!" And, ten minutes later I'd be scarfing down something fattening. And I think it's the low self esteem when I'd see these people, it would project it more and be like (voice softens) ugh, [and it made] it hurt more. "God, I'm not as pretty as that person or I want to be as skinny as her" and I'm not and I can't and every time I try I just can't. (pause) It makes you pissed just because they (voice softens) show you all these beautiful women on TV, like models . . . and it just gets you pissed off, that's the only way to put it, just because you can't be like that person, you're never going to be that person, you're never going to look like that person, and tough [crap] (laughs), live with it. I think it [is a] (pause, snaps fingers) reality check almost. (voice softens) You're not going to be like that no matter how much you want to be like that person, you're not. I think it just pissed me off.

Kate blamed female actors for the negative portrayals of women on television as well as for her feelings of anger and inadequacy. Kate talked about her experience watching the female actors on *Baywatch*:

It's very upsetting. (pause) For one, if it's someone that's drop dead gorgeous or what TV says it is, it makes me feel inadequate. It makes me feel like (pause) I don't look like that, (pause) I can't dress like that, I don't have hair like that (pause). My God, I'm not going to get a boyfriend or I'm not going to get a job or something like that and (pause) it also makes me very angry . . . when I see women that are letting themselves be used like that . . . I just get mad at the actors. [D]on't you see, they have a camera shot on your chest and your butt throughout the whole show, don't you think that maybe it's not your

> brains and your acting ability that they're after. And (pause) that may not necessarily be her fault, the actress, because that might be her career and she wants to act and that's a job . . . [but] I get mad at the actress for letting herself be treated like that because it just makes other women feel, I think, inadequate, and also (pause) I think it's harmful for that actress.

Gabriella, a younger participant, believes that female television actors and models perpetuate the unrealistic body images of women on television:

> . . . and these women that want to be models [are] starving themselves (pause) and they're the ones that are creating this look that they feel they have to obtain because they're starving themselves and getting so thin and eating, like (thinks to herself) lettuce. Just a little bit of lettuce the whole day and maybe a muffin, and that's not healthy. They're creating this cycle for themselves (pause) and people are eating it up. The media, they're loving it.

Irene, an older participant, reported that she did not care who was to blame for the unrealistic body images of women on television. She reported that she was angry about this negative imagery because, as a woman, she did not want to be portrayed as a sex object:

> I get angry because I don't want to be portrayed this way, because I'm a woman too, and this is how you're viewing me, whether you want to believe it or not. And this is the way you're viewing the women of the world. And I don't care what argument you give me about, (pause) well they [women on television] want to do it and that's why they're doing it, well that's fine, but I don't like what they're doing, and I don't necessarily believe they like what they were doing, but I have no way of proving that.

Both the younger and older participants believe that the stereotypical images of women on television are dangerous for young female viewers. The participants were concerned that the unrealistic

images of women on television may make some young female viewers, who do not look like television women, feel inadequate and not valued. In addition, the participants were worried about young female viewers who may physiologically hurt themselves by dieting in order to look like the women on television.

Beth, a younger participant, believes that the negative portrayals of women on television send poor messages to young female viewers. She described how she saw women portrayed on television and how her niece was being negatively affected by these images:

> I think that they all portray women as (pause) solely sex objects and (long pause) that they're only good for one thing. (pause) And we're here for men to have their way with. (pause) Something to look at rather than something to be heard. I think kids are influenced a lot by how (pause) women on TV look, (very long pause) how they dress, how they act. I have a five year old niece, I don't know if it's from me or TV, but she's already obsessed with her appearance. And if she thinks she looks stupid, she will not go out of the house (laughs). She's only five years old! . . . I just think that TV has a negative (pause) portrayal of women.

Gabriella, a younger participant, expressed concern that young female viewers may physiologically hurt themselves if they buy into the unrealistic images of women on television. She added that there are fewer unrealistic images of men on television; consequently, young male viewers are at less risk of being negatively influenced by television images than young female viewers:

> You get these girls that are fifteen, sixteen years old, popping diet pills, which is going to wreck their metabolism. They're dieting at fifteen, they're not even done growing (pause) at fifteen, sixteen years old, and they're trying to diet and get thinner and look like these women [on television] and (pause) that's so unhealthy. They're going to wreck their bodies and they want to have kids, (pause) a lot of them can

> forget it . . . (pause) So, that bothers me . . . and you don't see that with men. (emphasized) You don't see it.

Linda, an older participant, reported that the unrealistic images of women on television were degrading for women and provided poor role models for young female viewers. She reported that the female characters on *Baywatch* were particularly poor role models for young female viewers:

> They're really negative images . . . They're meant to (pause) degrade women. They're basically meant to keep women (pause) in an inferior role . . . It's almost like a subliminal message that's being sent. It's an indoctrination for young people.

The findings indicated that 75% of the participants were angry about the emphasis on women's bodies on television. They charged that television portrayals of women focused on their physical appearance rather than on their intelligence, abilities and accomplishments. In addition, two of the younger participants reported that these images negatively affected their self esteem and 56% of the women were fearful that the stereotypical images of women on television were sending dangerous messages to young female viewers about what society valued and how women should look in our society.

Women in Commercials

The following section reports on the negative portrayal of women in television commercials. In addition, it reports on the participants' views of how television advertises products aimed at women. Seventy-five percent of the participants reported that television negatively

portrayed women in television commercials and inappropriately advertised women's products (see Table 20). The most common product mentioned was feminine hygiene products. Eighty-three percent of the older participants reported that they were upset that feminine hygiene products were advertised on television. None of the younger participants discussed this issue.

The older participants believe that advertising feminine hygiene products on television is unnecessary and graphic, and makes them feel uncomfortable, especially when viewing with mixed company. In addition, the older participants reported that feminine hygiene products were shown on television commercials significantly more often than male hygiene products. All of the women cited below are older participants.

Linda reported that she was very offended by television commercials that advertised feminine hygiene products. She felt that these types of television advertisements aimed at women viewers were both unnecessary and degrading. In addition, she complained that male hygiene television commercials were less demeaning than female hygiene television commercials. When describing her feelings about feminine hygiene commercials on television, Linda became angry:

> Commercials can be very offensive, and they're always for women's products and women know these products exist and women use these products . . . I don't know if I speak for every woman, but I've heard it voiced by other women that we know products are there, and we know what to choose, they're in magazines, we don't need it flashed across the television screen. That's really degrading, that's something very personal, (pause) and while everyone knows this exists, (pause) you don't see men's products flashed the same way.

Irene also reported that advertising feminine hygiene products on television was pointless, and said that she felt uncomfortable viewing these types of commercials. Like Linda, she expressed her dissatisfaction that male hygiene products were seldom advertised on television:

> [C]ommercials for yeast infections (laughs) drive me crazy (laughing)! Now it's [medication] on the market and you can get it whenever you want. [Doesn't] anything ever happen to men? . . . [S]ome of these things that they advertise are personal . . . and that's why those scenes are uncomfortable to me, because it's something that I feel (stops), sanitary napkins, (laughs) is something you personally do . . . Why must we advertise our personal lives? (pause) We all know we have them, we all know what we do.

Diane reported that she was angry that most advertisements for hygiene products were directed at female viewers. She talked about this issue more in-depth than the other participants and explained how embarrassed she felt while watching these types of commercials with her husband:

> [H]ow come (pause) you can turn the TV on at any time of the day and hear a litany of douche commercials (pause) and tampon commercials and maxi pad commercials and all this other women stuff, (voice softens) but you never see it for guys? . . . I get embarrassed, and I think a lot of women get embarrassed when certain commercials come on or certain issues are brought up. (laughing) My favorite one to hate [is] the douche commercial between the mother and the daughter. I get (stressed) totally embarrassed when that commercial comes on. I probably shouldn't, I probably should be a mature woman, but when my husband and I are sitting and (pause) these two women are going on and on about douching (pause) and the special (pause) container and all, that is just an intimate thing and it does not need to be (laughs) discussed . . . And I think it's typical that we have commercials like [this] about women, but we don't have anything like [this] about men. I can't name any commercial that embarrasses my husband. (pause) [E]ven when they have (pause) a Cruex ad, which is all about jock itch, which is in the very private area, they don't even talk about that, they talk about athlete's feet because that's so much more acceptable. And I think (pause) [these] women and men issues go far deeper than just commercials.

Janet appeared to be less angry than the other participants about feminine hygiene products advertised on television and reported that she found them funny. However, like the other older participants, she reported that there were more hygiene commercials on television directed at women than at men:

> I love being in a situation where you've got (voice softens) people who are tuning [into] TV and all of the sudden you've got (voice softens) [the] new expanded butterfly version of New Freedom Maxi Pads. You've got this [woman], running around in her white spandex (pause), (laughs) can't we get past that? . . . [These types of commercials] make me laugh, and I don't feel uncomfortable with them. When they're advertising the OB fingertip application [tampon], it's just funny . . . [M]aybe I'm catching the wrong stations, but isn't there more feminine hygiene products advertised than there are male hygiene products? (softly) Because God knows, that they need them (laughs).

In addition, both the younger and older participants were critical of the negative portrayal of women in television commercials. The participants believed that women in television commercials were portrayed according to gender stereotypes and were portrayed as "sex objects," "stupid," or "helpless." In addition, they reported that they were angry because they felt that advertisers often underestimated the intelligence of female viewers and that television commercials aimed at women were unrealistic.

Frances, a younger participant, reported that she became angry watching television commercials that portrayed women performing traditional "women's work":

> If you see any cold commercial, it's always the Mom. Mommy doctor, mommy this, and the husband [is] just sitting there and he's helpless

> . . . and I think that's wrong. I think they play up the mommy in the kitchen. Any time it's for any kind of cookware, they show the mother in the kitchen . . . I think it's a stereotype that just is played out too much.

Gabriella, a younger participant, was upset that women in television commercials were depicted as sex objects:

> You see them doing . . . Revlon commercials and (pause) . . . you know they're prancing around on the beach and they're having all kinds of fun modeling and they're tall and they're thin . . . they look so healthy, they look so vibrant . . . (pause) these almost aren't real people (pause, softly) . . . but (pause) that idealism of women really bothers me . . . you don't really see that about the men.

Throughout all three of her interviews, Irene expressed a concern that women on television, especially in commercials, were portrayed as sex objects. During her first interview, Irene, an older participant, talked about an early experience with television advertising and sexism:

> There was a (pause) commercial, I don't even know the make of the car, but it [said] Body By Fisher. And you [had] the car there, but you [had] a woman on top of it. I was offended by that, even as young as I was, fifteen. And I did a report on sexationalism, and now that I think of it, even at fifteen, I must have been (pause) already being disturbed by some of the things I did see [on television], (pause) with even the commercials. Because (pause) from something comical and light and happy, they began to be intrusive because they were intruding on the way (stressed) I wanted to feel when I saw commercials.

Marie, an older participant, reported that she only recently began noticing the negative portrayals of women in television commercials. She reported that she was both angry and disappointed that advertisers frequently underestimated female viewers:

> A lot of times it's disappointing because I feel like (pause) the people who put the show together underestimate their audience, they assume that we're incapable and that bothers me . . . I was thinking about that in terms of commercials and the images of women . . . They have one where it's some sort of bathroom spray or something and (pause) it's all these women saying, "Oh, it's greasy, yucky, stuff" and underneath they put "soap grime," like we're too stupid to know that it's soap grime. "Oh, I don't like that yucky, smelly stuff." (voice rises) Mold? You mean mold (emphasizes)? (laughs) Mildew, is that what you're trying to say? But, you're too dumb because you're a woman. It's just so condescending. It really ticks me off.

Marie continued to express her anger about the portrayals of women in television commercials. She reported that there was a double standard in television advertising. To illustrate her point, she described a television automobile commercial portraying reverse sexism:

> [T]hey have a couple [commercials] now that are really amusing. (pause) And . . . I read in a magazine a lot of men got up in arms about this. (voice speeds up) [T]here's some ad about cars and these two women are standing on the steps and they're going, "Hmm, he's really trying to compensate for something, isn't he?" And these guys are driving these really fancy cars and they keep making comments about he's obviously insecure. And this guy drives up in this perfectly ordinary little sedan (laughs), gets out, and they're like, "Hmm, wonder what's under his hood?" (laughs). (voice softens) I was reading an article in Time or something, some magazine and they just (emphasized) were slamming this ad as being sexist . . . I'm thinking, what do you think we have to put up with all of our lives?

Janet, an older participant, reported that women in television commercials were often portrayed as helpless and dependent on men. She sarcastically and angrily described an ADT home security commercial to illustrate her point:

> Oh, and I love the ADT commercial for home security. The helpless little wife who's lying in bed . . . and the little kids . . . and then daddy

> . . . he's got his uniform on . . . he's coming home from work and now that daddy's home, things are safe. (pause, softly) You know, that's crap (laughs)! Really. That's [crap]. If the woman's got an ADT alarm system aren't you saying the alarm system is going to keep her safe? Why couldn't she be a single mother and she flicks on the alarm system and she jumps into bed and she's safe? But no, they [have] to put in the male, the male [is] home and now things are okay.

Linda, an older participant, was critical about the negative portrayals of women in television commercials for the same reasons as the other participants. She reported that women were depicted in television commercials as sex objects, and victims, and as overbearing. In addition, she reported that television commercials did not positively portray aging women:

> They always seem to focus on women's weaknesses, women as being victims, or women's over assertions and over aggressions. They never focused on the positive image of (pause) a woman . . . and if you're not young with this particular body image that's being presented on television, you don't fit in. They present it as though that's the mainstream and anything (pause) different, you're not acceptable. (pause) You don't see, a lot of (pause) older women in commercials, you don't see women with gray hair . . . There's nothing that really portrays (pause) aging as a natural part of life or that it's respected in any way. (voice rises) I think a person has to be pretty secure in their own self esteem, not to be swayed somehow.

Marie reported that television advertisers needed to be more socially responsible about the sexist and unrealistic messages that they were sending into viewers' homes:

> I don't think commercials and advertisers do women (pause) justice and I don't think they help women. I can remember when I was in middle school and watching my own mother do this, because my father was very sick, and she went out and got a job and then, finally, made a career after we were in school full time. And then she'd come home and she'd make the dinner and she'd clean the house and

obviously we're all helping and everything but, I had this image of my God, you have to be able to do all of this? In the meantime on TV they're putting on these things like (Enjoli perfume commercial--sings song), "You can bring home the bacon, cook it up in a pan and never let you forget your man." (voice rises) Somehow you're supposed to be sexy after you've done fourteen hours of work at home and at the office and you can [still] come home and turn your man on. I mean, let's get real (laughs)! So, on the one hand you have those sort of images, like I said, the images where these women are too dumb to even think what soap scum is. It's insulting and honestly I've never been a feminist and I've been looking at these commercials lately and it angers me. I don't want my daughter growing up with that image. This is what men want? I don't think being a superwoman is the answer and I also don't think that being a dumb bimbo is the answer, and that seems to be the only two roles we're ever cast into . . . I think there is an obligation to be socially responsible. And, (pause) if they try to present some other image like I said the car one, they're kind of doing the same thing men do to women . . . I hope that it is going to change. It seems like it's changing a little but gee, not fast enough.

The findings showed that 75% of the participants were angry that women were negatively depicted in television commercials and that television inappropriately advertised women's products. The older participants were especially upset that female hygiene products were advertised on television significantly more often than male hygiene products, and they felt uncomfortable viewing these types of television commercials with mixed company. In addition, the findings showed that the women were angry that television commercials were sexist and that women in television commercials were portrayed as young, helpless, dependent on men, and as sex objects. And, finally, the findings indicated that the women were angry that television advertisers underestimated the intelligence of female viewing audiences.

Women's Issues

The following section reports on the negative television portrayals of women's issues. Seventeen percent of the younger participants and 67% of the older participants reported that women's issues on television were negatively depicted (see Table 20). These women reported that when television focused on women's issues, the issues were trivialized. An example of this trivialization was pregnancy. Participants did not feel that pregnancy was always negatively depicted on television, but that under certain circumstances, especially in situation comedies, pregnancy and other issues related to women were not portrayed seriously or viewed as important.

Diane, an older participant, reported that the portrayal of the character Murphy Brown, an unwed pregnant mother (played by Candice Bergen), was realistic and reflected the trend of women having babies later in their lives. She was angry that former Vice President Dan Quayle "belittled" Brown's character for having the baby:

> In TV I see an all male club, and I think it's very difficult to break into that club. I mean just looking at (pause) TV shows, there are not many TV shows that have women as the prime character. And even in *Murphy Brown*, the one I'm thinking of off hand, they really have done a job on her . . . that whole incident with the Vice President (pause) a year or two ago, you know, belittling her. Well, first of all, she's a character, wake up Dan! But belittling her because she is an unwed mother, well (pause) where have you been? Are you living on another planet? There's probably more (emphasized) unwed mothers than there are wed mothers in our country. So, (pause) I honestly think if that was a guy, it wouldn't have made a big deal.

Also, Marie, an older participant, focused on Murphy Brown's pregnancy and was disappointed that former Vice President Dan Quayle objected to

the character's decision to keep her baby. She explained why she felt disappointed:

> I think the American family is going through transition and I don't think TV has found the new image to project (pause) and I think they need to do that . . . (pause) they keep trying to show how hard it is, you know look we're holding it together it's so hard, but they haven't shown the good side of it, I don't think they've shown it optimistically. And a few times that they tried it like with *Murphy Brown* which is a show I (stressed) love, here comes the Vice President [who is] going to slam her . . . (voice rises, disbelief) I can't believe he objected. This is the same . . . Vice President who doesn't believe in abortion? . . . what would [he] prefer to [have] happen, because the marriage thing isn't going to happen. What would [he] prefer she do, have a baby at 42 [years old] and give it up for adoption? I can't even understand what [he] was getting at . . . because I really thought it was well done.

Gabriella, a younger participant, expressed mixed feelings about the portrayal of Murphy Brown's pregnancy. On one hand, she thought the story line was positive because it depicted nontraditional families in a positive light. On the other hand, she was critical of former Vice President Dan Quayle's denunciation of the show and felt that the character had to have carried the pregnancy to full term because if she had chosen abortion, the television sponsors would have withdrawn their commercials from the program:

> I thought it was a really good controversy that came out of her getting pregnant, being a single mother and everything. Just because it's only her and her baby, doesn't mean that they're not a family. Just because I don't live with my father doesn't mean he's not my family anymore. And (pause, laughs, voice softens) Dan Quayle is just such an (laughs) idiot (laughs) for saying all those things that he said. A family isn't the number or the size, family is the feeling. And, I thought that . . . the show kind of had to make her keep the baby because if she had an abortion (pause) a lot of sponsors would have pulled out of that show.

Diane reported that television, in general, negatively portrayed pregnancy among unwed mothers and the recent trend of women past menopause conceiving by artificial means:

> There's a lot of women having babies in their fifties and sixties, and the TV has made an (emphasized) incredible deal about this. I have seen it on news shows, I've seen it on talk shows, I've seen it on *Primetime Live*, all those news magazines, and basically the feeling that I'm getting, the sense that I'm making out of it, is that this is some big terrible thing because these women should not be having babies at 50 and 60 [years old]. Their time is up and who do they think they are because when their babies are graduating from high school, they're going to be 70, 80, and 90 [years old]. Well that's [crap] because men have been having babies all their lives . . . I really think that if it was the other way around, (voice softens) [it] wouldn't be that much of a big deal. Men have been (pause) making babies right up until they're in their grave. Why is it such a big stinking deal for women?

Linda, an older participant, was critical of the television news coverage of the Bosnian war. She reported that television news did not adequately cover the fact that women and children were the primary victims of the war:

> Many people (pause) had thought that everything was settled (pause) only because of the way the news presented it, there was no coverage. And at first, when this war first started happening you knew women and children were primarily the victims. Now with the news, you know the war is happening and they show tanks and they show men in a military uniforms, but . . . (pause) they don't spotlight [the] violence [against] women and children as much . . . It's almost in the same perspective as women are portrayed as sex objects and victims [like on other television programming]. (pause) They're not important. When it shows the United Nations' peace keepers and tanks and uniforms and men, (pause) they're important. They're what this war is all about. The women and children are now in the background, you don't see them. They're (pause) anonymous.

The findings showed that 17% of the younger participants and 67% of the older participants were angry about the portrayals of women's issues on television. They reported that women's issues on television, such as pregnancy, were portrayed as not being important or were not shown at all. Many of the women reported that if women's issues related more directly to men, they would be portrayed more positively on television.

Women's Fears

The following section reports on television portrayals that focus on women's fears. Thirty-three percent of the younger participants and 50% of the older participants felt that many television programs deliberately focused on women's fears (see Table 20). They reported that television programming including *America's Most Wanted*, MTV, and television news made them feel scared and unsafe.

Ellen, a younger participant, was the most upset by the fact that shows like *America's Most Wanted* played on female fears. She believes that *America's Most Wanted* focuses on women's fears because the program highlights criminal acts against women:

> Shows like *America's Most Wanted*, as highly stupid as they are . . . still scare me . . . I think mostly as a female I hate watching that because most of the murders and rapists and arsonists and escapees, are all men . . . if a woman escaped from prison (pause) I would say, "Well, okay, fine, she's out." And if she was in my back yard, I wouldn't really be too afraid, but when a guy escapes from prison, of course, [he is] coming after me! I'm much more careful, I look around me because I know that this guy is still out. (voice rises) It's ridiculous because I'm sure a female prisoner is as dangerous as a male [prisoner], but . . . when I watch that show . . . it's scary to me . . . it's just meant to creep you out. I'm certain of it . . . [T]his show is . . . supposedly true . . . but

> . . . the (voice rises) females are always the ones who are victims. The female was raped, shot, strangled, all this other stuff, and thrown into a ditch somewhere . . . [I]t's like [they] put the fear of God in you . . . I can't remember the last time a male victim [was] killed . . . and you feel so helpless after you watch that show, because you're a female and you are the target of all those loony tunes who are out there abducting you, raping you, shooting you, [and] killing [you] . . . as a female I watch this show and [I] think Oh my God, every female is the target of a killer . . . so that's mainly why I don't like to watch it, I don't like to feel helpless, like the next victim.

Linda, an older participant, also expressed the view that shows like *America's Most Wanted* made her feel fearful and unsafe in her own home. She talked about the first time she watched *America's Most Wanted*:

> . . . that was amazing to find out that there was people (stressed) out there amongst everyone else that are really criminals walking around, bona fide criminals. It was almost like enlightening in some respects and frightening also . . . At first it seemed funny, we were kind of laughing about it, but then they actually flashed a picture of a person at the end and [they] tell you that this person's out there on the loose and they give you a number to call. It really makes you want to check to see that your doors are locked in your house . . . [I]t's a frightening theory, it makes you almost like a hostage in your own home . . . it's a real sense of fear.

Janet, an older participant, reported that watching violence on television, especially violent images on television news, made her feel distrustful of people:

> I . . . would like to see what it would be like to not have all that violent media stuff on TV. (pause) Would people treat people differently? (pause) My feelings of people is that I don't trust them and I don't think that all people are inherently good . . . There's crazy kooks everywhere. I mean that's a pretty big generalization and where did I get that from? Apparently not through personal experience, those kinds of thoughts about people have come directly from (pause) what I see on TV . . . if it's a possibility that TV has enhanced my belief that people are bad and untrustworthy - well (voice softens), that's not very

> nice . . . because my actual experiences with people have been positive. (pause) So, is what I see on TV stronger than what I experience? I don't know.

Kate, a younger participant, reported that she did not like watching violence against women on television. In addition, she was upset that television focused more on violence against women than on violence against men. Below, she refers to MTV and television news:

> I also didn't like . . . when you see women being beaten and thrown around, what the hell's that all about ? . . . [Y]ou see this on TV all the time, or you see [it] on the news, this women got raped, this women got stabbed. It seems like nothing really happens to men . . . it's scary.

Also, Kate reported that as an adolescent, watching violent images against women on television made her confused about male and female relationships:

> I remember seeing . . . the women get hit around . . . it scares you, it makes me feel like I'll never find [a] person that will like me, or if I do they're going to hit [me] or, [these violent images] just makes me . . . think that there's [no]one out that you will meet that might treat you right.

Linda, an older participant, discussed her experience watching portrayals of violence against women on television news. She reported that the lack of television news coverage of the Bosnian War, which she reported was a war primarily against women and children, made her pessimistic about women's rights. In addition, she reported that the coverage of the war made her feel fearful for her own safety as well as for the safety of her daughters:

> I'm watching this news coverage and this is happening to women and [women are] being shot and killed and little children and (pause) this is going on in the present day and age . . . I live in a different part of the world, even though we're safe, it affects us as individual[s], my outlook was very bleak as far as (pause) women's rights, as far as respect for women, because our government can't speak up and say this has got [to] stop. (pause) My feeling on watching this was if this was primarily a war against men, what would happen then? (long period of silence). [I]t really bothered me because I realized how my child is not safe, how I'm not safe, how my older daughter is not safe. I felt very vulnerable by watching the news, very vulnerable. It made me sad, it made me angry, it just made me really upset.

The findings showed that 33% of the younger participants and 50% of the older participants felt that many television programs deliberately focused on women's fears and on violence against women. It is interesting to note that the majority of viewing experiences that the participants described included real images of violence against women as opposed to fictional images of violence against women often found in made-for-television-movies and music videos. The women reported that these television portrayals of actual events made them feel vulnerable as women, unsafe in their own homes, and pessimistic about what our society values.

Women in Sports

The following section reports on television portrayals of women in sports. The lack of women's sports on television and the negative portrayals of women in sports on television were common themes among both the younger and older participants. Seventeen percent of the younger participants and 50% of the older participants reported being angry that male sporting events were shown significantly more often than female sporting events on television; furthermore, when female athletes

were highlighted on television, the emphasis was on gender-related issues and physical appearance rather than on athletic ability and accomplishments (see Table 20).

Ellen, a younger participant and a Masters candidate in Physical Education, was the most angry about the negative portrayals of female athletics on television. She reported that she was upset because television did not adequately cover female athletic events:

> I can never remember seeing any female basketball players [on television]. The first time I can actually say I recognized and I knew who it was in 1984--Cheryl Miller was [an] All-American [at the] University of Southern California and she was on the Olympic [Basketball] Team. So, . . . I was almost fifteen years old the first time I can actually say there was a female sports role model on television. Yeah, there was Chrissy [Evert-Lloyd] and there was Martina [Navratilova] and tennis players, but tennis players are always on TV. [I] never saw basketball which was a sport I played, [I] never saw softball . . . that's a sport I played . . . All you saw were the guys.

Diane, an older participant, reported that she was an athlete when she was younger and felt angry that television did not value women in sports. She reported that male sporting events were shown significantly more often on television than female sporting events. Furthermore, she reported that she was worried about the potentially negative messages that her three-year-old daughter was being exposed to in relation to women and sports on television:

> I don't see any women's sports being telecast. Usually when I tune in it's men, men, men, whether it's tennis or anything else. I do not like to watch men's tennis. I like to watch women's tennis because I relate. I like to watch women's sports. (voice rises) Very rarely are you ever going to find a women's basketball game on TV. Very rarely are you going to find a women's tennis match on TV unless it happens to be a final, and then they cut into it repeatedly to highlight men's semi-finals or quarterfinals. And I just see it in so many different ways . . . [Y]ou never see a women's golf tournament on TV. Never (laughs). And I

> could probably go on and on, these things really annoy me. I really like to watch women in sports, because I'm a woman and (pause) I think it will be really terrific for my daughter to grow up seeing women, instead of being told, "Well, no, you can't play soccer, you need to dance." No! I don't want my daughter to dance if she doesn't want to. I want her to play soccer or tennis or golf or whatever she wants to do. (voice rises) But, suddenly, maybe not so suddenly for me, but suddenly in this media (pause) we have got a very clear [message] that women's sports don't count for crap . . . I wonder if my daughter (pause) as she's growing up, if she picks up on that. (pause) There has been good and growth, but I still can't help but feel with TV it's a man's world.

Ellen reported that she was angry that male sporting events were shown significantly more often on television than female sporting events. She believed that women's volleyball was shown on television because Gabriella Reese, a pro-volleyball player, was a model:

> You see women in volleyball only because [of] Gabriella Reese, who's a top model. [She] plays volleyball and she really has turned the game around. I remember watching beach volleyball as a kid . . . they would cut back [from the male volleyball coverage] and show the women, they would bump the ball over the net, somebody would spike it and they would say (imitates announcer), "And there's the women's game," (laughs) . . . "now let's go back to the men's." It's like, the women are playing just as hard as the guys, probably better, they're in the same heat, they're on the same sand, they've got to wear those little bikinis, that are probably much less comfortable (laughs) than the guys' shorts . . . It's just (long pause) unfair.

Another reason the participants reported being angry about the negative portrayals of women's sports on television was that the commentators focused on gender-related issues and physical appearance.

Ellen was critical of the way female coaches as well as female athletes were depicted on television. She reported that when female athletics were televised, the emphasis was on gender-related issues:

> How many male coaches in college have children, or have newborns? Probably a lot. But when Pat Summit [Head Coach of University of Tennessee women's basketball] adopted a son, (voice softens) . . . that's the only thing they talked about. (voice rises) It was a semi-final game, in women's NCAA basketball [tournament] and that's the only thing that the male announcers could stick too . . . Give the woman a break! . . . [Y]ou [would] never even know Bobby Knight [Head Coach of Indiana University men's basketball] has kids if you didn't read anything about him . . . so [television sports announcers are] constantly throwing gender in women's faces and I don't think it's fair.

Ellen was especially frustrated when she described an interview with Gabriella Reese on ESPN2, a national cable sports network targeted at young female viewers. Again, she reported that she was angry about the sexist coverage of women's sports on television:

> [ESPN2] . . . [interviewed] a young hockey player and they also [interviewed] Gabriella Reese . . . [ESPN2] put a font under [Reese's] picture [that] said, "Volleyball Babe" . . . They didn't put "Young Hockey Stud," [or] . . . "Go Get 'Em Tiger Hockey Player" [under the hockey player's picture]. (laughs) Why did they have to put "Volleyball Babe" [under Reese's picture]? There was no reason for it. Just because she's got a little more in the looks department . . . there's no reason that they had to put [that font] under [her picture], it's disrespectful . . . just because she's pretty and she's athletic. And I don't understand why they can't separate the two. That happens all the time . . . but (pause) television [is] depicting her as this (long pause) female who only can play volleyball because she's pretty. And if ESPN[2] is gearing this toward . . . a young female audience, (voice softens) what are they thinking about?

Irene, an older participant, was critical of television because she reported that television focused on the physical appearance of female athletes rather than on their athletic abilities. She used female ice skaters to illustrate her point:

> One girl [female ice skater] came on, I thought for the moment, not this year, a couple years ago, I thought she was all nude or the back was nude, but it was all this . . . net that looks flesh colored. So, I guess you have to be as attractive as you must, but it always seems to be the woman that has to be as attractive as she must, you know, besides being a good skater. And I know she's being graded on her skating, but I wonder if they also get graded on their costumes.

Linda, an older participant, also talked about female ice skaters on television. She reported that she felt upset because the television tabloids focused on physical beauty rather than on athletic ability when covering the Nancy Kerrigan and Tonya Harding Olympic story. Like many of the participants, Linda reported that she worried that the negative messages about women in sports on television were influencing her seven-year-old daughter:

> [T]he media doesn't realize how it reaches people. But, (pause) I have a child who I really worry about as far as how she's being impressioned by all of this [the coverage of Kerrigan and Harding]. And they constantly would talk about Tonya Harding, and, . . . in my opinion . . . she has a very athletic body, but they talked about Nancy Kerrigan being graceful and, (pause) [the very] figure of a skater. It was always body appearance and how she was just graceful and how she had the appearance that they wanted, but Tonya Harding was stocky and had heavy thighs, and they never stopped to present her as an athlete . . . She's very athletic. All they talked about was body types and appearance and never athletic ability. And that really annoyed me.

The findings showed that 17% of the younger participants and 50% of the older participants were critical of the way women's sports were negatively portrayed on television. They reported that male sporting events were shown significantly more often on television than female sporting events and that when female athletes were shown on television,

the emphasis was on gender related issues and physical appearance. In addition, the older participants expressed concern about how their daughters were being influenced by the negative portrayals of female athletes on television.

Women in Soap Operas

The following section reports on the participants' experiences with the negative portrayals of women in television soap operas. Thirty-three percent of the participants reported that women in television soap operas were portrayed unrealistically and as sex objects and "bitches," and as dependent on men. An even number of younger and older participants reported this finding (see Table 20). Furthermore, these participants reported that a double standard existed in relation to male and female behavior in television soap operas.

Ellen, a younger participant, complained that the male characters on soap operas could be portrayed as promiscuous and less than desirable citizens but that when females characters were portrayed the same way, viewing audiences were critical of their behavior:

> Asa [a male character on *One Life to Live*] . . . he's done so many (stressed) dirty, rotten, scoundrel tricks, everybody thinks [he is bad], and that's okay . . . but then you get a female like Erica [a character on *All My Children*], people (stressed) hated her . . . there are actually people who think that their characters are real, and they'll call up and they'll make death threats to Erica and (laughs) news flash, (laughing) Erica is a character, but they'll make death threats and they'll say women shouldn't act like that and Erica's a slut . . . I'd like to see how many death threats were made for Asa. Again, it goes back to the old society outlook that it's okay if a guy does this and [for] a guy [to be] promiscuous, but if a girl [is], somebody should shoot her and she's mean and she's evil.

Diane, an older participant, was critical that female portrayals in soap operas were degrading to women. She also complained that there was a double standard in soap operas in relation to appropriate behavior:

> It's just so clear cut what's expected (laughs) . . . I think the soap operas are so degrading for women because basically . . . what the soaps are really doing is (pause) they're having the women be sex objects, jumping in and out of bed, and crying and fussing and upset until the men can come and rescue them (pause). I'm thinking of the shows that once in a while I tune into. (voice rises) There isn't one strong woman except perhaps Erica Kane on *All My Children* who is labeled a bitch (pause) or a Dorian Lord on *One Life To Live* who is labeled a trouble maker. (pause, voice softens) Why isn't there just some women who are (pause) strong and independent?

Linda, an older participant, reported that she was upset that soap operas never depicted women realistically. She talked about soap operas in relation to her own experience raising three children as a single mother:

> I thought [soap operas] were such a waste of time. There's nothing realistic about [them] or having to do with life. And it presents an image that life is basically women dressing up with a lot of makeup and clothing and jewelry and just looking good as an object. There was never a sense of self-worth about these women that they were important, or if they had an important job it was because they were a CEO of a company. They never presented women in a real light, struggling, providing for her family, and I think probably because I had been divorced and raised three children on my own for eight years, that I knew the strengths that women can have. And she can be all of those things too, she can look nice, she can (pause) still be feminine, but she can still provide and have strength. But that didn't seem to be quite the message that came across.

The findings indicated that 33% of the participants were angry about the unrealistic and negative portrayals of women in television soap operas. These women reported that television soap operas portray

women as promiscuous, overbearing, and overly concerned with their physical appearance.

Summary

The findings showed that 92% of the participants were angry about the way women were portrayed on television. They reported that television portrayals focused on women's physical appearance and age rather than on their intelligence and abilities. These negative portrayals, according to the participants, included women in television commercials, women in television sports, and women in soap operas. In addition, these women reported that television portrayals did not value women's issues and focused instead on women's fears. Several of the younger women reported that the negative portrayals of women on television negatively affected their self esteem and 56% of the participants felt that television was sending harmful messages to young female viewers about women's place in society.

Positive Portrayals of Women on Television

Although most of the participants were critical about the negative portrayals of women on television, they also reported that there were some positive portrayals of women on television, although not many. All of the younger participants and 67% of the older participants reported that they admired specific women on television. Of these participants, 50% of the younger participants and 25% of the older participants reported that

the women on television they admired often served as role models (see Table 21).

The participants discussed, reported to admire, and shared similar feelings about the same women on television. These television women included day time talk show hosts, television news reporters and characters appearing in situation comedies. They included: Oprah Winfrey (day time talk show host); Ricki Lake (day time talk show host); Barbara Walters (news reporter and co-anchor of *20/20*); Diane Sawyer (news reporter and co-anchor of *Primetime Live*); Connie Chung (news reporter and co-anchor of *CBS Evening News*); Mary Richards (lead female character on *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*); Murphy Brown (lead female character on *Murphy Brown*); Julia Sugarbaker (female character on *Designing Women*); and the entire female cast on *Cheers*. The participants felt that these television women were portrayed as "strong," "intelligent," "successful," "professional," "independent," and "witty."

Table 21
Positive Portrayals of Women on Television

	Age of the Participant		
	Younger 18-23 Years Old	Older 30-45 Years Old	Total Number
Number of Participants Who Admired TV Women	6	4	10
Number of Participants Who Said That TV Women Served As Role Models	3	1	4
n=12			

Television Women Who Were Admired and Why

The following section is divided into two parts: (1) television women who were admired and why and (2) television women who served as role models. Sixty-seven percent of the younger participants reported that they admired day time talk show hosts. None of the older participants reported this finding (see Table 22). The most frequently discussed talk show host on television was Oprah Winfrey. Many of the younger participants reported that they liked Winfrey because she was smart, in control and successful. In addition, the participants said that they liked her because she did not come from a privileged background and she was a woman. The participants reported that they liked her show

because Winfrey, unlike other talk show hosts, was dignified, respectful, empathetic, and did not make money off other people's misfortunes.

Table 22
Television Women Who Were Admired

	Age of the Participant		
	Younger 18-23 Years Old	Older 30-45 Years Old	Total Number
Day Time Talk Show Hosts	4	0	4
News Reporters	2	2	4
Situation Comedy Characters	3	2	5
n=10 (note that this number corresponds with Table 21 under the title, "Number of Participants Who Admired TV Women")			

Amelia, a younger participant, talked the most about her admiration for Winfrey. Amelia, a journalism student, believes that Winfrey is a good journalist and admires her because she is honest, happy, and has done what she wanted with her life:

> (softly) She's professional. (long pause) I like Oprah, I think she's (pause) an independent woman and she (pause) has done what she wants to do with her life. I don't look at Geraldo that way, I don't look at Sally Jessy Raphael that way . . . (pause) [I] certainly don't look at those other stupid talk shows that are on in the morning (pause) who are making money off of other people's grief and their dysfunctional lives [that way]. (pause) I think Oprah (pause) is a good journalist. (pause) She asks good questions and she (pause) often (pause) tells about her life . . . (pause) about her weight loss . . . and her family and

everything else. (pause) That's why I like her. I think the other [talk shows] are just garbage, they're just there to make money. (voice softens) But I don't think [Oprah's] like that. (period of silence) . . . it seems like Oprah reconciles a lot of people on her show and . . . she sort of (pause) makes people feel good with her show, she (pause) puts her arm around people in the audience when they ask questions . . . Oprah sort of is like a rebel, she sort of does what she wants to do . . . She's a real person . . . I don't think Oprah needs to make the money or wants to make the money, I think she likes being there and doing what she's doing . . . I think she's happy with her life and you can tell, you can see it. (period of silence) I guess that's it, I guess that's why I like her.

In addition, Amelia reported that she admired Winfrey because she was comfortable with her appearance which, she reported, often contradicted the stereotypical images of women on television. Also, she reported that she liked Winfrey because she kept her personal life private:

. . . She doesn't wear diamonds . . . [and] you never see Oprah with a gown on or anything like that. She just wears normal suits and she just looks nice all the time . . . (pause, softly) I respect Oprah in that way. (voice rises) And I also respect her because it doesn't matter if she's 220 pounds or she's 150 pounds, she's happy either way, she looks as if she's happy anyway. She doesn't care what other people are saying about her . . . She's also quiet, you don't really see her anywhere else or doing anything else . . . she's a normal person. She's not running around in limousines and you don't see her spending so much money on her clothes and that type of thing.

Kate, a younger participant, expressed that she liked Winfrey because she was dignified, intelligent, successful and a woman. Also, Kate reported that she liked Winfrey because she is not like other talk show hosts who take advantage of other people's misfortunes:

I think she's very confident and (pause) I think the way she presents her stuff, that's what sets her aside. She doesn't seem to sensationalize, she seems sincere in her presence. Well, maybe she's just a good

> actress and she's fooling me, that's possible, she's very intelligent, she could just be putting one over me . . . But (pause) I think that there's a sincerity in the way she does her show . . . a form of dignity as far as the way she (pause) presents her show . . . There's not that (pause) ridiculousness of it.

Frances, the youngest participant, reported that she admired Ricki Lake. *The Ricki Lake Show* is a talk show aimed at teenagers and viewers in their early twenties. Frances reported that she admired Lake because she catered to younger audiences, unlike other talk show hosts. In addition, Frances reported that Lake was down to earth and that she confidently spoke her mind. In addition, she reported that she liked Lake because her physical appearance contradicted the stereotypical images of women on television:

> I like Ricki Lake . . . I like that talk show . . . she seems really down to earth, she's younger too, she's not old like Donahue or Sally where the person [is] so much older, it's more on my level because she's a younger person . . . and (pause) [she's] more personable . . . (pause) she's funny too, she's kind of a cheery person almost . . . I don't think she's the ideal talk show host, she's kind of chubby, she just seems like a real . . . person . . . She gets involved and she says what she thinks, not what she's supposed to say and what's written on her little card. She speaks (pause) her mind . . . I think that's good.

Other television women admired by participants were television news reporters. Forty percent of the participants reported this finding (see Table 22). These television news women included co-anchors of network morning news programs, national evening news programs and evening news magazines.

Helen, an older participant, reported that she admired Connie Chung and Diane Sawyer. This was an interesting finding because she

reported that she did not like watching most female television news reporters because they were less competent, less professional, and more emotional than male television news reporters; however, she said she liked Chung and Sawyer because they were professional, confident and factual:

> I think it's their attitude because they throw off . . . a manly attitude, I don't want to say that, but (pause) they come across as stern, [they] just want to tell you the facts and (pause) there's nothing I can do about them, that's the way it is. That's the kind of reporter I like. And I take them more seriously. And those two women, I think do that for me. They come across as telling me what it is, and (pause) I can report this because I know what I'm doing, they're very confident.

Fifty percent of the participants reported that they admired female characters on situation comedies (see Table 22). Diane, an older participant, talked about an early admiration for the television character, Mary Richards on *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. She reported that she identified with and admired Mary Richards because she was the first woman on television that she saw who was single, successful and happy:

> I liked that show. (pause) I think I liked it because she was very independent and she didn't need a man (pause) and I was brought up in a family where men are everything. My mother had to have a man to be successful, and my brother was so much more . . . valued because he was a boy, and as a girl I never really felt valued because the family I grew up in men are everything. And I just grew up never believing that because someone has an extra part than I do that they should be more valued, so I think for me, [*The*] *Mary Tyler Moore* [*Show*] was like this breakthrough television show, because here was this woman who was in her thirties, who didn't have to be married, and had no intention of getting married. [She] had a wonderful job, and wonderful friends, had her own apartment and did what she wanted to do, and . . . watching that (pause, voice softens) I always kind of thought see, I don't need a man in my life, I don't need to get married to be somebody, and so I think that was really what stood out for me, so I enjoyed watching that because I knew (pause) that is kind of what

> I wanted to do . . . so for me [*The*] *Mary Tyler Moore* [*Show*] was the first time that anybody ever really let me know that. Because nobody in my family was certainly going to say it . . . So that was pretty important for me. That's why I enjoyed that show.

Gabriella, a younger participant, reported that she admired the television character Murphy Brown because she was one of the few fictional working women on television and because her character was strong and she got what she wanted:

> She's one of the working women that you do see . . . she's a news reporter and she's a very strong minded, strong willed woman, who can usually get what she wants because she's just a very dominant person. And I think that's good. I mean she's not feminist dominant, she's just this is what I want, I'm going to get it. If a man was like that, he's ambitious, but usually when women are like that they're just some damn feminist. But you don't get that impression from her, you just get the impression that she's strong willed and she's going to go after what she wants, and she does . . . I kind of admire her . . . And I think she's good for a lot of women, because women, even though you see women anchors on TV and things, you don't see what they go through even though they make light of her situation and it's a funny show.

Marie, an older participant, reported that she admired the television character Murphy Brown because the character reminded her of herself. She reported that Murphy Brown's character was strong, opinionated, and sarcastic:

> Oh, I love Murphy Brown. And I think a lot of it is because she's such a strong character and I (pause) see a lot of myself in there (laughs). Very, very opinionated, which I am repeatedly accused of being . . . I really like it because she's got the sarcasm, she's very strong willed.

Marie also reported that she respected the television character Julia Sugarbaker on *Designing Women*. She reported that she appreciated

Sugarbaker's character because she spoke her mind and often said what many women wanted to say but chose not to:

> I really have grown very fond of that show because I like the main character, Julia Sugarbaker. I love her . . . Boy she is spittin' fire when she gets going . . . I think she says what we'd all like to say. (pause) [W]hen a jerky guy comes over and explains to you that, of course, you should want to go out with him. [S]he will come out and say (voice begins to rise) what you'd want to say to every guy who ever did that to you (laughs) . . . and it's the type of thing that if you could say what you were thinking, (pause) you would say [it]. And I think that's kind of why she's such a pistol on the show and I think that's probably why I like her character so much because she just really makes you laugh because you've thought that a million times, but you'd never say it (laughs) . . . and I think women tend to respect women who can do that.

Gabriella also reported that she liked the female television characters on *Designing Women*, especially Julia Sugarbaker's character. She reported that these female characters took charge of their lives and stood up for what they believed in:

> Julia Sugarbaker. She's (pause) not exactly [a] feminist, but she has some feminist views and she's another take charge of her life kind of woman. And (pause) if someone, male or female, is trying to take something away from her that she's worked for and earned, (pause) she'll stand up and she'll be like, "No, you're not taking that away from me, I've worked for that!" . . . And (pause) [the female characters on *Designing Women* are] mostly women that stand up for things they believe in, they work hard . . . They know what they want, and they're doing it.

Diane, an older participant, reported that she liked the female television characters on *Cheers* because they were not cast into traditional female roles. She talked specifically about the female characters on *Cheers*, Rebecca, the bar owner, and Carla, the waitress:

> I think the shows that I really like are the ones that don't have the women in the traditional roles. Even on *Cheers*, here were these two women, one of them ended up being the business partner, which I thought was great, and the other one being the waitress who just told everybody where to go, and didn't take any crap from anybody. [These two female characters] didn't have (pause) the family life that's expected. Rebecca wasn't married . . . even though she desperately wanted to be, but they kind of made light of it. [Carla] had all these kids which she wasn't home (laughs) parenting them . . . Maybe that's kind of why I like those shows.

Ellen, a younger participant, also expressed that she liked the female television characters on *Cheers* because they contradicted the stereotypical images of women on television that she grew up viewing. Below, she compared the female characters on *Cheers* to the stereotypical image of Daisy Duke on *The Dukes of Hazzard*:

> I loved the female characters on *Cheers* because they're smart, because they stood their ground, because they don't just sit there and go [imitates Daisy Duke on *Dukes of Hazzard*],"hey y'all!" They're funny, they could come back with a comment just as fast as a male could come back with a comment. And I thought that was great, they could stand on their own. They commanded respect and they got it . . . they were people and they did things, they made things happen for themselves, they didn't sit there and have something else happen to them. So they were initiators . . . it was nice watching it because they were funny women, they were strong women, they were humorous, they were vulnerable, (voice softens) they were normal.

The findings indicated that 100% of the younger participants and 67% of the older participants reported that they actively sought out and enjoyed watching positive portrayals of women on television. The data showed that they admired the following female television personalities and characters: day time talk show hosts, news reporters, and "strong" characters on situation comedies. They reported that they liked to watch

and admired these women because they were portrayed as independent, intelligent, professional, successful, and witty.

Television Women Who Served as Role Models

The following section reports on television women who served as role models. Fifty percent of the younger participants and 25% of the older participants who reported that they admire specific women on television also reported that many of these television women served as role models (see Table 21).

Amelia, a younger participant, reported that both Murphy Brown and Oprah Winfrey served as role models because their lives and accomplishments, whether real or fictitious, inspired her to strive for her own goals:

> When you look at Murphy Brown and she's got this great career and she's so wonderful, you kind of think (pause) I could do it, if Murphy Brown could do it, I could do it . . . You do have role models that you see on TV and (pause) although you know no one is ever that perfect, you do see them, and you do become affected by seeing [them] . . . I think I told you this in one of the other interviews that I think Oprah is just wonderful, I think she's just the best. And I think that (pause) I like (pause) to see (pause, voice softens) women in positions like Oprah. (pause) I like to see women journalists. (softly) I like to see (pitch of voice rises) women do anything . . . [It] sort of makes you think you can do anything you want to do. Oprah's just a perfect example.

Beth, a younger participant, reported that both Winfrey and Barbara Walters were positive role models. She believed that these women were strong, empathetic, and respected. Also, she reported that she admired

Winfrey's ability to keep her personal life private and she believed that these women had something that she wanted-to be successful:

> I think they're both strong, they're both successful, they're both women. (long pause) They're both taken seriously by people . . . I like Oprah because . . . she also talks about her own life and she's open and honest about what's happening in her life and she doesn't just (pause) listen to other people talk, pouring their hearts out. She'll sympathize with them and talk about herself . . . I like Barbara Walters because she's kind of pushy, she gets what she wants, she's personable, (pause) people listen to her . . . they're both positive role models. They have things that I want . . . I wouldn't want to be that successful, or that popular, but just their character traits . . . I want to be successful (laughs) . . . I know Oprah has (pause) boundaries between (pause) work and her personal life (pause) mainly because she's smart. She's (pause) healthy (laughs) . . . just those characteristics. (period of silence) They don't act dumb.

Kate, a younger participant, reported that Winfrey and Walters served as role models for her. She felt more passionately about this issue than some of the other participants and spoke about it in-depth:

> This may sound a little ridiculous, but when you see someone like Oprah, or like Barbara Walters, as women, I'm into that kind of thing. When you see people like that, it kind [of] inspires you, (pause) look at these women, look at what they're doing. So, I'm getting a positive message . . . It's really a very positive thing for me. I think it makes me just strive for whatever I want to do . . . and . . . you have this image of people [who] have accomplished things come from the perfect families and they come from money and . . . have everything handed to them. And a lot of these women didn't . . . I'm not rich and I don't have all these little things that society thinks are important to get ahead. And (pause) so it makes me think okay, if they did it, I can do it too, no matter what I do, I can achieve my goal. And (pause) it makes me want to work harder . . . And . . . when I watch them I see how educated they are it makes me want to be educated . . . they're not just doing one thing, they're doing so many different things, and they have what seems like a complete life of what I want to do as far as what I want to be ten years from now and what I hope to have achieved and how I hope to impact people. I think that's what I get out of it. And

> . . . if I have people . . . telling me negative things [like] "No you can't do it," that there's something there that I look at and I say well maybe I can do it because if other people have, I can. And I think those people are great role models.

Kate continued to discuss why Winfrey and Walters served as role models for her. She said that she admired these television women because they achieved professional success with less opportunity than her own generation had:

> . . .these women grew up in a generation where women really couldn't do those things. And look at them, they're older than me, I think I have more of an opportunity, my age group, we're lucky, women can do a lot more . . . more women are getting their doctorates, getting their masters, that's something I want to do one day. And these women maybe didn't have those opportunities back then and look at them. And that's what I think in general, they're really excellent role models, I think it impacts on what women do . . . they have a lot of strength, you see that. They have to in order to do what they did. And they have to have something up there [points to her head] and really good self-esteem. And I think women . . . need role models like that, especially kids . . . Not to say that men are [not role models] but for me as a woman, I look at more of the women. There's always been men who are role models . . . but very few women, only recently. (pause) And you know, it's nice to see that (pause, voice softens) they're not being exploited like a lot of times TV tends to do to women, because these women have brains and they're in control of their lives. (pause) which I think is really important. I hope to have that control over my life.

Diane, an older participant, explained why the television characters Mary Richards and Murphy Brown served as role models for her, especially Mary Richards when she was in high school. She reported that these two television characters helped her to come to terms with her own place in society as a woman:

Mary [Richards] was way ahead of her time . . . she was a trailblazer. And (pause) I guess back in the '70's when I was in high school . . . (pause, voice rises) this was just unheard of having this woman (pause) out in the working world, having her own apartment, and being independent and successful in her career, so I really took to that show . . . because (pause) as a high school student who was getting ready to go to college, I was unsure of myself, I (pause) didn't have a lot of confidence. I wasn't really sure what was going to happen to me once the comfortableness of high school was over. What was going to happen to me in college? So to look at somebody like that who was so totally unlike my mother (pause) it was kind of nice to feel (pause) wow, (voice softens) she really can make it. It will be all right . . . Initially Mary [Richards] was (pause) the first women I really saw that could get along without a guy and now even watching *Murphy Brown* or any of these other shows with women as the main character, it just validates for me that's it's okay . . . That it's okay that you don't have to depend solely on a man the way they did way back in the early days of TV. That it's okay to be your own person (pause) and to be secure in yourself and independent and make a good salary to support yourself. And if a guy happens to come along, or like myself, you know, I have a nice supportive husband then that's a nice perk. (pause) But it doesn't have to be the way my mother told me it had to be. (softly) So that's the meaning I get from that.

The findings showed that 100% of the younger participants and 67% of the older participants admired specific women, both real and fictional, on television. In addition, 50% of the younger participants and 25% of the older participants reported that many of these television women served as role models for them. They reported that they enjoyed watching television programs that focused on women who were smart, empathetic, independent, successful and respected.

Critique of the Television Media

The following section reports on the participants' critique of the television media. Eighty-three percent of the participants were critical of

the television media. The same number of younger and older participants reported this finding (see Table 23). The television media in relation to this finding included the local and national news and television tabloids, especially *A Current Affair* and *Inside Edition*. The participants reported that the television media focused on the sensational and the negative, did not respect people's privacy, and were too powerful. The most common news stories discussed included stories about television and film personalities, musicians, Tonya Harding and Nancy Kerrigan (the alleged attack and issue of Olympic eligibility), Lorena Bobbitt (physical attack on her husband) and Michael Jackson (alleged child molestation). At the time of this study, the above stories were being reported on television.

Table 23
Number of Participants
Who Were Critical of the Television Media

	Age of the Participant		
	Younger 18-23 Years Old	Older 30-45 Years Old	Total Number
Participants Who Were Critical Of The TV Media	5	5	10
n=12			

Helen, an older participant, reported that she felt badly for actors that the television media, especially the television tabloids, focused on:

> I thought those newspaper things were bad, but when they get ahold of something on TV, boy they don't let go . . . It seems like television (pause) doesn't come out and tell you when something good happens, but they tell you when people make asses out of themselves.

Kate, a younger participant, was critical of the local and national evening news. She reported that television news programs no longer focus on news-worthy information but rather focus on the sensational:

> We've seen so much of Tonya Harding and Nancy Kerrigan and (laughs) Lorena Bobbitt and that whole thing played over and over again. And sometimes I'm wondering if I'm watching the news or if I'm watching (laughs) *Inside Edition*. (voice rises) It's like that takes priority over people dying (pause) in Russia, or in Somalia, or the people dying in this country from homelessness . . . It's just amazing . . . Lorena Bobbitt and (laughs) what she did to her husband is not necessarily something that has to be replayed out in the news. (voice begins to rises gradually) I think that there's more important things that should be discussed . . . it makes you wonder what are [our] priorities in this country? What do we value?

Diane, an older participant, reported that the television media invaded people's privacy and may have negatively influenced legal cases:

> It's just like the Michael Jackson thing. He's being put on trial through the media. The Tonya Harding thing, she's being put on trial through the media. They have no business being in there. That's what our legal system is for. So (pause) the meaning is they have their noses in where it doesn't belong. And I think it really affects (pause) legal cases, and people's perceptions, and when they get on a jury, I think they've already been (pause) exposed to too much.

Also, Gabriella, a younger participant, expressed concern that the television media may have negatively influenced legal cases. Below, she talked about the television coverage of the child molestation allegation against Michael Jackson:

> If I were him and I was having a trial by jury, I would be a little scared because (long pause) how would you feel, you walk into a jury and there's twelve people sitting there and they've been asked the question, "[Do] you know about what happened with Michael Jackson?" "No, what?" . . . I would not want someone [who] was that (hesitates) not tuned in with things on my jury . . . I don't understand why the media has to [make] such a big deal out of it. That's a complete invasion of privacy but no one's going to say that and do something about it.

Frances, a younger participant, discussed her experience watching the Michael Jackson story on the television news. She reported that the only reason the story received so much attention from television was because it involved a famous personality. In addition, she questioned the validity of the television coverage because she felt that reporters were not careful about who they interviewed about the allegations:

> If I was just some Joe Schmoe who molested a few kids, it wouldn't be on national TV, it wouldn't be on global TV all over the world. It's because it's Michael Jackson . . . I think if they didn't play it up so much and then they did find out that he did do it, fine, play it up after that who cares, he deserves it . . . but there's (pause) so much stuff going on you don't know what to believe . . . are these people really credible? . . . Who is this person? . . . How do you know what this person is saying is true and say these people are being paid by (pause, softly) the little boy's parents . . . or they just want (voice rises) to get [a] little spot on TV . . . I think a lot of it has to do with money, people just want to get money and if they have to say something that's not true, who cares?

Two of the participants reported that they were upset about the way the television media reported the 1986 explosion of the Challenger Space Shuttle. They reported that the television media unnecessarily focused on the death of Christa McAuliffe, the school teacher on board, while they ignored the other crew members who died in the accident as well as their families.

Gabriella, a younger participant, reported that she was upset with the television media because they insensitively reported the death of the crew members:

> When the Space Shuttle blew up (pause) I wasn't really sure what had happened until they said it blew up and [Christa] McAuliffe, the teacher that went with them, she died, and everybody died. And then they go on this big thing about what it must have been like the last few minutes, (softer) just let them go. They died, they exploded, why do we have to know what they felt right before they exploded? That bothered me, especially [for] the families. (in a softer voice) Families don't want to know what a horrible death they died. If your husband was in a car accident, do you want to know everything he felt right before he died? I wouldn't . . . let them go, they died.

Linda, an older participant, recalled her experience watching the Challenger explode and felt that the media focused on Christa McAuliffe's death while ignoring the other crew members who died in the explosion:

> (recalls vividly) I actually saw the moment when it blew up. And (pause) you knew it had blown up, you knew something happened, but it was so hard to believe that you were watching this, that you were experiencing it, that I saw the looks on the faces of the people in the audience and there was (pause, softly) . . . the teacher that had been there, her family, her mother and father were standing there, and I can remember her mother turning and saying, "What happened?" "Is it okay?" "What happened?" And not knowing and wondering. (pause) And everybody looking shocked but nobody had an explanation, and they weren't sure if it was okay or not, it was (pause) so hard to believe . . . (pause) It was like a heaviness, a sadness for these people, (voice rises and speeds up) for all the families involved and then I think after a while . . . I was really upset with the news media because it portrayed . . . [Christa] McAuliffe . . . so much and her story and there were so many other lives that were lost and they had families just as well. And that bothers me. (pause) Because while it was sad, yes, for this family, it was sad for everyone else, for all of the people involved, all of the families.

In addition to reporting the insensitivity of the television media, several of the participants reported that the television media were too powerful and controlled public opinion. Gabriella, a younger participant, indicated that the television media did not always report information in its entirety which, in turn, did not allow viewers to make informed decisions. In addition, she reported that the television media, not the government, ran the country:

> It bothers me that [the television media is] so powerful and [is] so effective, especially since it's not any one person that you can pin it on . . . It's the whole institution of it and (pause) that's bad because they only tell us what they want us to know to sway our opinions either for or against something, which I don't think is right, I think [if] people are going to make a fair opinion they have to see the whole picture. And they're not doing that . . . The media basically controls who's in power if you think about it because . . . when [Clinton] was running . . . all the media ha[d] to do is say one bad thing about him and harp on it and . . . his approval rating [would] go way down . . . They have so much power it's scary . . . they're the ones that are in control.

Also, Marie, an older participant, reported that the television media had too much power and she felt that journalists needed to act more responsibly:

> I don't think people realize the power the television has. It's . . . probably our government's biggest tool for the future. If you look [at] what happened in [this] last election (pause) the media ran the campaign. The (stressed) media elected Clinton . . . and it happened without anybody really realizing they were consciously doing it and that's frightening because I think (pause) not only does television [and] the producers have to take more responsibility, but, obviously, the journalists have to be more responsible. They have a duty to the public to be unbiased and they are breaching that duty . . . And (pause) that worries me for the future. It worries me that nobody's going to stop it from getting worse and if we're not careful the media's going to [continue to] elect (pause) our representatives.

The participants reported that the television media focused too often on the negative. Diane, an older participant, reported that not only does the television media focus on the negative but it takes advantage of other people's misfortunes:

> I don't like to generalize, but it just seems to me that the media . . . is (pause) into selling papers and the way you do that is by really blowing up the negative and every time you . . . watch TV, you just are inundated with negative. I feel terrible that there was an earthquake in L.A. last week. I have family in L.A., and I was concerned about them. But I don't think that we needed twenty-four hour round the clock coverage on every single channel. What I found after a couple of hours was that it (pause) was just taking advantage of people's plights . . . so typical of TV, just to get on there and to take advantage of someone's misfortune. I've watched newscasts where somebody just lost their son, who has a bullet in his head, and he's still laying warm on the ground bleeding to death and the mother is hysterical. (annoyed) Do we really need to see the mother hysterical? Or do we really need to go up and ask the mother how she feels? I don't think so . . . It makes me angry . . . It's like negative, negative, negative, negative. I would really like to hear positive. And I think if we heard positive, it would be like a self-fulfilling prophecy, that perhaps people might just start behaving more appropriately.

Marie, an older participant, reported that the media negatively portrayed politicians, which contributed to the lack of nationalism in the United States:

> There really is no sense of citizenship and no sense of my country, my duty to my country and things like that . . . I think that's sad and I think (pause) television adds to that lack of nationalism because (pause) you're constantly having reporters trying to make a name for themselves by diminishing the people, the players in Washington. Diminish what they're trying to accomplish, diminish their record, diminish their overall view for the future . . . I think that's very discouraging for children, I think that's why a lot of children grow up feeling very helpless, there's really nothing I can do, it's out of my hands. They're all crooked and there's nothing I can do about it, and (stressed) that's (pause) unfortunate, because you don't get dreamers

> from people who feel helpless. (pause) And you don't get visionaries from people who feel helpless. (softly) And I think that's one of the biggest things this country's missing right now, and I think TV has a (stressed) huge role in that.

Also, Marie reported that because it was in the best interest of the television media to focus on the sensational and negative, television was not being used to its fullest potential as an educational tool:

> Everything we hear . . . is guns and another person shot by accident . . . (voice rises) you're not going to tell me that 40 years ago they didn't have that idea that guns were going to be a problem. It doesn't take a genius to realize if you keep manufacturing guns at this production rate, and the birth rate only goes up this amount, by the year X, every person in America will have the ability to have a gun. It doesn't take a genius to figure that out . . . everybody says . . . throw more money at education - but the government's idea of educating people is well we'll put out a pamphlet that if you write to Pueblo, Colorado, you can get. Well, what about the most powerful influence you have which is the TV? Why . . . didn't [the government] put on, twenty years ago as the crime rate was increasing, . . . something [for] parents, if you have a gun in your house, this is what you need to do to protect your child from hurting themselves. This is what you need to do to prevent your gun from getting stolen and being used in a crime later. This is an alternative to having a gun in your house. They don't do that . . . I'm not really sure why. Sometimes I almost think it's better for them not to do it because that way they have something sensational to [televise] (pause) it's almost self-serving not to do it.

The data indicated that the 83% of participants were angry that the television media focused on the sensational and the negative, did not respect people's privacy, and were too powerful. In addition, the participants felt that the television media were acting irresponsibly and negatively influencing legal cases and people's behavior.

Chapter Summary

The findings showed that 92% of the participants were angry about the way women were portrayed on television. Furthermore, the findings indicated that 75% of the participants reported that television portrayals of women focused on their physical appearance rather on than their intelligence, abilities and accomplishments. Forty percent of the younger participants who reported that television focused on women's physical appearance believed that these unrealistic images negatively affected their self esteem. Fifty-six percent of all the women who reported that television focused on women's physical appearance were fearful that television was sending harmful messages to young female viewers about what society valued and how women should look in society.

In relation to television commercials, the findings showed that 75% of the participants were angry that women were negatively depicted in television commercials and that television inappropriately advertised women's products. The older participants were upset that female hygiene products were advertised on television significantly more often than male hygiene products. Both the younger and older participants who reported that television negatively portrayed women in commercials were angry that television commercials were sexist and portrayed women as young, helpless, and dependent on men.

Regarding women's issues, 17% of the younger participants and 67% of the older participants were angry that women's issues on television were not valued or were not shown. Also, the findings showed that 33% of the younger participants and 50% of the older participants felt that many television programs deliberately focused on women's fears and on

violence against women. The participants reported that the television portrayals that focused on women's fears made them feel vulnerable, unsafe in their own homes, and pessimistic about women's places in society.

Regarding women in sports, the findings showed that 17% of the younger participants and 50% of the older participants reported that male sporting events were shown significantly more often on television than female sporting events and the commentators' emphasis was on gender-related issues and physical appearance when female athletes were shown. Furthermore, the findings showed that 33% of the participants were angry about the unrealistic and negative portrayals of women in television soap operas and reported that women in soap operas were portrayed as promiscuous, overbearing, and overly concerned with their physical appearance.

Although most of the participants were critical of the negative portrayals of women on television, the findings showed that 100% of the younger participants and 67% of the older participants admired women on television who were portrayed as independent, intelligent, professional, successful, and witty. In addition, 50% of the younger participants and 25% of the older participants who reported that they admired specific women on television reported that many of these women served as role models for them.

Finally, the findings showed that 83% of the participants believed that the television media focused on the sensational and the negative, did not respect people's privacy, and were too powerful.

CHAPTER VII

DISCUSSION

Overview

It may be unfair to assess television from a cognitive perspective because the medium is not designed to teach. Television is designed to sell products and ideas to television viewers. However, investigating the educational impact of television among female college viewers is an important and necessary educational endeavor because television viewing is so pervasive and the findings of this study showed that television is communicating negative ideas about women. This finding supports and contributes to the existing research on the negative depiction of women on television (Burke, 1993; Douglas, 1994; Huston et al., 1992). Furthermore, the findings of this study support the observational learning theory (Mazur, 1990) and show that female college viewers model and learn from television portrayals. So, what is television teaching female college viewers?

The meaning that the participants created from their television viewing experience is that women on television are second class citizens; they are to be seen and not heard; they are dominated and often victimized by men; and, that women as well as women's issues are not valued. What is surprising about these findings is that the television industry and television advertisers negatively represent women who are the viewing market they most want to attract. Why, then, do the television industry and television advertisers continue to negatively depict women on television? What would happen if the television industry and

television advertisers positively portrayed women on television? Would female viewers buy more products that are advertised on television? More importantly, why do women continue to watch television if their viewing experience is not equitable?

The findings show that the women in this study watched television for the following reasons: to learn and be informed; to relax and be entertained; to escape. They also looked to television as a source of companionship; as a way to socialize and feel connected to people; as a way to relieve boredom; as a source to view positive portrayals of people; and, as a source of comfort and consistency in their lives. These findings support the existing research on why people watch television (Albarran & Umphrey, 1993; Huston et al., 1992)

The above findings on why the participants watch television still do not explain why they watch television if their viewing experience is not equitable. Perhaps the desire to fulfill the above needs (i.e., to relax and be entertained, to relieve boredom, as a source of companionship, etc.) is greater than the demeaning experience that the participants have when they are confronted with negative images of women on television. Even if this is true, why aren't they seeking alternative ways to fulfill their needs, rather than subjecting themselves to the negative portrayals of women on television? Perhaps television viewing is the preferred activity because the medium is convenient and inexpensive.

In addition to the negative portrayals of women on television, the findings from this study show the following: (1) television viewing is both negatively and positively associated with the formation and maintenance of certain attitudes and beliefs; (2) television viewing is negatively associated with the formation and maintenance of certain emotions and

behaviors; and, (3) television viewing is negatively linked to specific cognitive skills and activities.

In order to provide clarity for the reader, this chapter is divided into four sections: (1) television viewing and social learning; (2) television viewing and cognitive activities; (3) demographic data; and, (4) support for the methodology.

Television Viewing and Social Learning

In order to provide clarity for the reader, this section is divided into two sections: (1) attitudes and beliefs; and (2) emotions and behaviors.

Attitudes and Beliefs

The findings of this study show both a negative and positive association between television viewing and the formation and maintenance of attitudes and beliefs among female college students. On the negative side, the findings show a negative association between television viewing and beliefs about gender related issues and self-esteem. On the positive side, the findings show a positive association between television viewing and identifying with positive portrayals of women on television.

The findings show that the self esteem of many of the younger participants was negatively affected by stereotypical images of women on television. Many of the participants reported that they often compare themselves to television women who are commonly portrayed as young, thin and physically beautiful. This finding was disturbing because it

suggests that young female television viewers are at greater risk than older female viewers and male viewers of developing negative attitudes and beliefs about themselves as a consequence of watching television.

For example, the younger participants reported that the stereotypical images of women on television made them feel angry and inadequate about the following: (1) their own body images and (2) career opportunities. These findings support the Cultivation Hypothesis (Morgan, 1982) and the drip model (Huston et al., 1992). The Cultivation Hypothesis and the Drip Model help to explain why the younger participants' attitudes and beliefs about self esteem are negatively affected by television viewing. The Cultivation Hypothesis maintains "that the more time people spend watching television, the more likely they are to perceive the real world in ways that reflect the patterns found in television drama" (Morgan, 1982, p. 948). In other words, the more women are exposed to television, the greater number of stereotyped messages they are likely to receive. The Drip Model suggests that repetitious messages and images (commonly seen and heard on television) gradually shape expectations and beliefs about the real world (Huston et al., 1992). Although this study investigated television viewing among adult females rather than children, the findings support the studies of Morgan (1982) and Zuckerman et al. (1980) on the negative relationship between television viewing and gender stereotypes among female viewers.

The findings that are most alarming are those that show a negative association between television viewing and participants'' beliefs about career opportunities. These finding suggest that young female college students, who watch television and who believe that they do not look like television women, are at risk of not pursuing desired career opportunities.

What implications do these findings have for the millions of young female college graduates who are entering professional arenas? Does this suggest that young female college graduates, who do not look like television women, are not setting long-term professional goals because they feel that their chances of reaching those goals are limited? This finding is disturbing for three reasons: (1) young female college students seldom have the opportunity to see women working in their professional environments, with the exception of female educators; (2) young female college students are basing their beliefs about working women from television; and (3) television portrayals of working women are unrealistic (Metzger, 1992; Vande Berg & Streckfuss, 1992). These findings suggest that young female college students are being misinformed about the professional world as well as their potential places in the professional world.

In light of these findings, colleges and universities need to develop and implement mentor programs for female college students in order to counteract the unrealistic images of women on television. The mentor programs should be designed so that young college females: (1) have the opportunity to see real women working in professional arenas; (2) get a realistic view of women in the working world; (3) have the opportunity to see that the majority of working women do not fit the physical depictions of television women; and, (4) that these real working women are successful.

Perhaps the older participants in the study were not as negatively affected by the stereotypical images of beautiful women on television because the older participants were: (1) more socially developed than the younger participants; (2) already engaged in healthy, long-standing

relationships; (3) working in professional arenas; and, (4) had a better sense of self through life experience and maturity.

This is not to say that stereotypical images of beautiful women on television went unnoticed by the older participants. The older participants were angry about the stereotypical images of beautiful women on television for three reasons: (1) they did not want to be viewed as sex objects; (2) they were fearful that young women, especially their daughters, would emulate these unrealistic images; and, (3) television did not positively portray women in general, especially aging women.

The findings show that the older participants felt that they had control over their viewing of negative portrayals of women on television. To control their viewing, they either turned off the television, changed the channel, or encouraged others to speak out against the negative depiction of women on television. This finding was not surprising because as women, especially educated women, get older they discover that they have control over many facets of their lives including their television viewing. Perhaps, as the younger participants grow older, find their places in society, and are confronted with many of the challenges that women face, they too may feel the need and the ability to take greater control over their viewing. It would be interesting to do a follow-up study on the younger participants in 20 years and see if their views about control and television viewing mirror those of the older women in this study.

As to the stereotypical images of beautiful women on television, both the younger and older participants blame television actresses who appear in stereotypical television roles for their feelings of anger and inadequacy. This finding is disturbing because it suggests that the

television industry and television advertisers are pitting women against women.

For example, female television viewers who do not fit the physical description of television women may display anger toward physically attractive women in general because, in comparison, they feel inadequate and not valued. These findings are attributed to the Recognition and Respect Theories (Huston et al., 1992). These theories play a significant role in shaping female viewers' beliefs and attitudes about what society values. Who is really responsible for the negative depiction of women on television? What can be done to show television women more positively so that women's television viewing experiences are more realistic, valuable, ethically balanced and empowering?

In addition to the findings that show women are negatively portrayed on television, the findings also showed that women's issues are negatively portrayed on television. This finding supports and contributes to the existing research on the negative depiction of women's issues on television (DeMause, 1992; Devitt, 1992; Douglas, 1994; Houston et al., 1992).

According to the older participants, women's issues on television are not shown as important or valued. It is interesting to note that with few exceptions only the older participants focused on this issue. Perhaps this was true for the following reasons: (1) older women, through life experience, may be more aware of the challenges that women face in society; (2) older women, through life experience, may be more aware of and dissatisfied with the portrayal of women's issues on television; and, (3) older women may be more comfortable and confident than the

younger participants about their physical appearance and relationships with other people.

The finding that women's issues are negatively depicted on television was not surprising in the wake of the Anita Hill hearings, the William Kennedy Smith rape trial and, more recently, the O.J. Simpson murder case. In all three cases, the television media have been accused of focusing on the sensational and downplaying the central issues: the prevalence of sexual harassment and violence against women in society.

The most famous and recent example of the negative depiction of women's issues on television, although not discussed by the participants, is the O.J. Simpson hearings. During the O.J. Simpson hearings, the television media, especially television tabloids, have often focused on the personal lives of Nicole Simpson, one of the murder victims, and Marcia Clark, the prosecuting attorney. The actual murders, the consequences of the murders and the reality of domestic violence in the United States have received less television media attention.

For example, the television media reported that Clark had recently been divorced. How is Clark's recent divorce relevant to the O.J. Simpson hearings or to the murders of Nicole Simpson and Ron Goldman? Why was Clark's divorce considered news, and who made the decision to air information about Clark's personal life that was not relevant to the murders? What is television communicating about Clark and her presence as the prosecuting attorney? Is the television media suggesting that Clark was an inadequate wife or that she could not handle the double responsibility of maintaining a family and being an attorney? Or, was the television media suggesting that Clark did not like men in general? Very little television media attention has focused on the personal lives of O.J.

Simpson's attorneys, mostly males, and Goldman, the other murder victim. What does this television coverage communicate to women, especially women who have been victims of domestic violence? Does the television coverage of the O.J. Simpson hearings suggest to women as well as to men that violence against women is not an important issue? Does it communicate to the millions of television viewers that if someone has money, in this case O.J. Simpson, that s/he can buy their way out of anything?

The findings from this study that television viewing is negatively associated with social learning, coupled with findings that television negatively portrays women's issues, suggest that female viewers are at risk of developing unhealthy attitudes and beliefs about themselves. As long as television continues to present negative images and ideas about women and does not portray women's issues as important, there is a great risk that female viewers will feel unsafe, vulnerable, inadequate, and not valued.

On the positive side, the findings of this study show a positive association between social learning and television viewing. The findings show that the participants admired television women who they felt were positively portrayed. These television women include female day-time television talk show hosts, female television journalists and fictional female characters on situation comedies. Also, the findings of the study show that many of the television women who are admired also serve as role models. This finding supports the Observational Learning Theory (Mazur, 1990), the Identification Model and the Pleasure Principle (Comstock, 1989).

The television women that are admired and serve as role models include: Oprah Winfrey; Ricki Lake; Barbara Walters; Diane Sawyer; Connie Chung; Mary Richards; Murphy Brown; Julia Sugarbaker; and the entire female cast on *Cheers*. The findings of the study show that these television women are admired and serve as role models because they are strong, intelligent, successful, professional, independent, and in control of their own lives.

The finding that female college viewers admire television women who are positively portrayed at work is not surprising for the following reasons: (1) the findings from this study show that female college students obtain information about working women from television; (2) all of the television women admired are working women; (3) young college women seldom have the opportunity to see real women working in their professional environments; and, (4) all of the participants of this study express a desire to obtain a professional position after college.

The finding that female college viewers admire television women who are positively portrayed is encouraging because the behaviors that the participants report admiring are prosocial. Therefore, watching positive portrayals of women on television can have positive consequences for female college viewers if the behaviors that are modeled are prosocial. In addition, this finding is especially encouraging because three out of the 12 television women who are admired (including the four female characters on *Cheers*) contradict the stereotypical images of women on television. Connie Chung is an Asian American, Oprah Winfrey is a Black American and both Oprah and Ricki Lake have been or are overweight.

On the negative side, the above finding may have negative consequences for female television viewers in light of the Observational Learning Theory for the following reasons: (1) the television women that serve as role models only represent a small percentage of American women; (2) all of the television women cited above are physically attractive, which reinforces and supports the stereotypical images of women on television; and, (3) many of these television women are fictional characters.

For example, the participants reported admiring Murphy Brown, Barbara Walters, Diane Sawyer, and Connie Chung, all of whom are television journalists. The findings also show that the participants often confused the fictional television journalist (Murphy Brown) with the real television journalists (Barbara Walters, Diane Sawyer, and Connie Chung). Perhaps this is true because Murphy Brown, the fictional character, is portrayed on the show as a friend of real female television journalists. These findings support the research that suggests television often blurs fact and fiction (Prothrow-Stith & Weissman, 1991).

The blurring of the occupations among real and fictional working women on television may be conveying unrealistic and inaccurate information to television viewers. For instance, Murphy Brown's professional and personal life is highlighted on *Murphy Brown*. On the other hand, television seldom highlights the personal lives of Walters, Sawyer, and Chung (with the exception of Chung, whose decision to have a baby was highly publicized on television). Therefore, female viewers may look at the portrayal of Brown, who seldom experiences sexual discrimination, child care problems, and issues facing many single unwed mothers, and assume that her fictional life accurately represents the lives

of real female television journalists or single, unwed mothers. If this is true, the consequences may be negative because female viewers are being misinformed about the lives of real television journalists as well as the lives of real, single, unwed mothers.

Another disturbing finding is that all of the fictional television women who were admired, including Murphy Brown, Mary Richards, Julia Sugarbaker, and the entire female cast on *Cheers* appear in situation comedies. Does this suggest that fictional working women on television are not taken seriously? If so, what are the consequences for female college students who are turning to these television women for role models and information about working women? This finding needs further investigation. In addition, if television is the only source that female viewers are turning to for positive role models, the consequences may be negative because there is little opportunity for female viewers to meet the actresses who portray these fictional television women, and television women represent only a small percentage of American women.

It is interesting to note that many of the participants who were 30 years of age or younger, who discussed television women, and who admired positive portrayals of women on television either: (1) denied being a feminist; or, (2) denied that the television character they admired exhibited feminist behavior. For example, Gabriella reported that Murphy Brown's character was not "feminist dominant," but rather that the character simply gets what she wants. When describing Julia Sugarbaker, a female character on *Designing Women*, Gabriella said, "she [is] not exactly [a] feminist, but she has some feminist views . . ." These findings support the work of Douglas (1994), who suggests that many female viewers who grew up watching the negative depictions of women and

women's issues on television often disassociate themselves from feminism.

Emotions and Behaviors

The findings of this study show a negative association between television viewing and the formation and maintenance of emotions and behaviors among female college students. For example, the findings show that television viewing is negatively associated with influencing and shaping expectations and beliefs about the real world. The participants reported they often felt unsafe, distrusted people and were afraid to leave their homes after watching television news, television tabloids, and shows like *America's Most Wanted*.

The above findings support the Observational Learning Theory (Mazur, 1990). Also, the above findings support and contribute to: (1) the mean-world syndrome (Waters & Wright, 1991); (2) existing research suggesting that television viewers often adopt a view of the world that reflects the violence found on television (Prothrow-Stith & Weissman, 1991); and, (3) the theory that fear is linked to watching mystery and suspense programming (Huston et al., 1992) as well as television news and fictional programming (Gerbner, et al., 1986; Waters & Wright, 1991).

The findings that show that the participants frequently felt unsafe, distrusted people and were afraid to leave their homes after watching television were not surprising because a lot of television focuses on violence, especially violence against women (Waters & Wright, 1991; Zoglin, 1991). For example, television tabloids, especially *America's Most Wanted*, often highlight criminal acts against women and television news

often focuses on the sensational and negative. These findings are important because Comstock (1989) reports that the amount of televised violence does not realistically represent the amount of real life violence. The combination of these findings is alarming because it suggests that television is falsely conveying and reinforcing the idea that women are unsafe and are at risk of being victims of violence; consequently female television viewers are at greater risk than female non-television viewers of developing false beliefs about the real world.

The finding that shows a negative association between television viewing and expectations and beliefs about the real world may be negatively influencing the willingness of female television viewers to participate in prosocial community related activities. For example, female television viewers who reside in suburban neighborhoods may not want to engage in urban community projects because television news portrays cities as high crime areas. Also, female television viewers may be less willing to travel to new places and pursue job opportunities in urban settings as a result of watching continuous portrayals of violence on television. The question remains: Does watching violence on television inhibit female television viewers' ability to engage and experience life to its fullest? This finding and the potential consequences need further investigation.

At the same time, it is interesting to note that the participants use television to escape their fears. For example, the findings show that the participants turn on their televisions when they are alone so that the sound of the television drowns out alarming noises. The participants did not indicate what programs they tuned into to fulfill this need. In light of the above findings, this action seems contradictory. Does turning on the

television, which often focuses on violence, to drown out alarming noises, actually increase and contribute to women's fears thus perpetuating the cycle? This finding needs further investigation.

Lastly, the findings of this study show an association between television viewing and the formation and maintenance of negative health habits. For example, the findings show that television viewing is positively associated with overeating. This finding is disturbing because it suggests that female television viewers are at greater risk than non-television viewers of developing coronary heart disease, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. Television viewing may also contribute to sedentary lifestyles. This finding is ironic because many participants reported that they had low self esteem because they often compared their own bodies to those of stereotypically beautiful women on television. These findings suggest that as more female television viewers are bombarded with the stereotypical images of beautiful women on television and the more they eat while watching these images, the more unhappy and frustrated they may become.

Overall, the findings of this study show both a negative and positive association between television viewing and social learning among female college students. The findings show a negative association between television viewing and beliefs about gender-related issues and self-esteem. This finding is attributed to the fact that women on television are commonly portrayed as young, thin and physically beautiful. On the positive side, the findings of this study show a positive association between social learning and television viewing. The findings show that the participants admire television women who are positively portrayed. Unfortunately, many of the television women who are admired are not

real. This suggests that television may be conveying unrealistic and inaccurate information about women's lives. Lastly, the findings of this study show a negative association between television viewing and the formation and maintenance of emotions and behaviors among female college students. The findings show that television viewing is negatively associated with influencing and shaping expectations and beliefs about the real world. The participants reported that they frequently felt unsafe, distrusted people and were afraid to leave their homes after watching television news and television tabloids.

Television Viewing and Cognitive Skills and Activities

The findings from this study show that the following cognitive skills and activities are negatively associated with television viewing among the participants of this study: (1) reading; (2) studying; and (3) creativity and imagination. The first two findings (reading and studying) do not support the existing research that suggests cognitive skills, for the most part, are not negatively associated with television viewing and that there is little evidence that shows television viewing displaces valuable cognitive activities (Anderson & Collins, 1988; Huston et al., 1992).

The finding that shows that television viewing negatively influences the amount of time the participants spend reading may not be important from a cognitive perspective because the participants already know how to read. In other words, television viewing does not affect their ability to read. On the other hand, the finding that shows television viewing negatively influences the amount of time the participants' children spend reading is important from a cognitive perspective because

many of these children are at the age when they are learning how to read. This suggests that television viewing may be negatively affecting children's ability to read because the participants' children spend more time watching television than practicing reading skills. This finding supports the Displacement Hypothesis (Anderson & Collins, 1988; Huston et al., 1992). This finding as well as its potential consequences needs further investigation.

The most alarming finding from this study in relation to cognitive skills and activities shows that television viewing is displacing homework and study time among the participants. The reason this finding is so alarming is that it dramatically challenges the existing research that suggests only minor displacement of homework and reading (Anderson & Collins, 1988). Perhaps, the findings of this study contradict the findings in the existing research because the participants of this study are grown women who do not have their parents monitoring their television viewing.

The negative association between television viewing and homework is an extremely important educational issue. Furthermore, some desktop computers now have a feature where the user can watch television on the computer screen while working on the desk top. In light of the above findings, this new technology may have negative educational consequences for students.

If college women are focusing more attention on television and less attention on academics, their likelihood for life success may be lessened. For example, if college women choose to watch television rather than participate in internship programs that help them focus on their professional lives, they will not obtain career related experiences;

consequently, their likelihood of being competitive in the job market after college is decreased. This finding suggests that television viewing may be negatively affecting women's ability to be competitive in the working world. These issues and their consequences need further investigation.

As to creativity and imagination, the findings show that television viewing is a relatively undemanding activity. Many of the participants report that the reason they watched television is that they did not have to think while watching. This finding supports the existing research that demonstrates a negative association between imagination and television viewing among adult viewers (Anderson & Collins, 1988).

It is important to note that specially designed children's programs have been frequently credited for increasing imagination and creativity among its viewers (Anderson & Collins, 1988). However, *Mister Roger's Neighborhood*, which has been credited for moving slowly to allow for reflection and absorption of age specific content, probably would not hold an adult viewer's attention. This finding reinforces the idea that adult entertainment television programming is not designed to enhance imagination and creativity among its adult viewers. This finding is disappointing because it indicates that television is not being used to its fullest educational potential.

Regarding why the participants watch television, the findings show that the number one reason is to learn and be informed. This finding supports the existing research on why adult White American viewers watch television (Albarran & Umphrey, 1993; Huston et al., 1992). This finding is alarming for two reasons: (1) the above findings show that cognitive skills and activities are negatively affected by television viewing; and (2) adult television programming is not designed to teach or promote

learning. The combination of these findings is disturbing because it suggests that female college students may be less well informed than people who obtain their information elsewhere.

For example, the finding shows that the participants watch television news to learn and be informed, which is ironic because the participants complained that the television media focus on the sensational and negative. However, current studies show that heavy television news viewers were often less well informed than light television news viewers (Lewis, 1992; Lewis & Morgan, 1982). In addition, the findings show that the participants also watch day time talk shows and made-for-television movies to learn and be informed. These findings are disturbing for three reasons: (1) none of the above programs are designed to teach cognitive skills or enhance information processing and learning; (2) none of the above programming regularly incorporates cinematic codes that have been positively associated with information processing and learning (Huston et. al., 1992); and, (3) television news, day time talk shows and made-for-television movies often focus on sensational issues and violence, especially violence against women.

If television news, day time talk shows and made-for-television movies focus on sensational issues and violence, especially violence against women, what are female viewers actually learning? Are female viewers learning that violence against women is normal? Are the sensational issues typically highlighted on television talk shows reinforcing the idea that the world is a mean and scary place? What is clear is that viewers who watch television news, day time talk shows, and made-for-television movies to learn and be informed may be less well informed than people who obtain their information from other sources.

On the positive side, the findings show that the participants learn from television programs that they either relate to or identify with. Many of the participants reported selecting and watching specific television programming, both commercial and noncommercial, that supported their interests and related to their lives. This finding is important from an educational perspective because it supports the Identification Model (Comstock, 1989). The Identification Model suggests that when television viewers identify with the television content, they are more likely to experience the information as instructive (Comstock, 1989).

For example, Diane reported that she enjoyed watching and learned from informational television programs that focused on pregnancy and Parkinson's disease because she could relate to these topics. Diane was pregnant with her second child at the time of this study and her aunt was suffering from Parkinson's disease. This finding suggests that viewers who carefully select their television programming can learn from television content that directly relates to their interests and life experiences.

Overall, the findings from this study show that specific cognitive skills and activities are negatively associated with television viewing among female college students. The cognitive skills and activities that are negatively affected by television viewing include: (1) reading; (2) studying; and, (3) creativity and imagination. Furthermore, the findings show that the participants watch television to learn and be informed. This finding suggests that female college students may be less well informed than people who obtain their information elsewhere for the following two reasons: (1) cognitive skills, information processing, and learning are negatively associated with adult television viewing; and (2) adult

television programming is not designed to teach or promote learning. This finding is particularly disturbing because the participants are watching television news, day time talk shows and made-for-television movies to fulfill this need. All of these programs focus on violence, especially violence against women. Lastly, and on a positive note, the findings show that female college students learn from television programs that they either relate to or identify with. This finding supports the Identification Model (Comstock, 1989).

Demographic Data

Annual Estimated Income

The finding that the older participant's average estimated annual income is $53,000 is surprising because only 50% of the older participants reported working. Also, the finding that shows the estimated annual income of the participants' parents is $61,521 is much greater than what was expected. Perhaps, these findings are higher than expected because: (1) only four of the six older participants offered the information; (2) the participants were asked to estimate their own as well as their parents' annual income rather than give an exact figure; and, (3) college women who have higher socioeconomic backgrounds may be more willing than college women who have lower socioeconomic backgrounds to participant in projects like this one. This last finding needs further investigation.

Access to Television

The findings that show that the younger participants have 1.5 televisions in their homes is fairly consistent with the existing research that shows that the average American home has two television sets (Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1992). It is important to note that none of the younger participants lived in dormitories. Three of the younger participants lived in off-campus apartments or houses and the other three younger participants lived at home with their parents. On the contrary, the finding that shows the older participants have 3.5 televisions in their homes is significantly greater than the national average. Perhaps the older participants have more televisions in their homes because they make more money per year and have more disposable income than the average American household. This finding needs further investigation.

The finding that shows 83% of the older participants had a television in their bedroom and 50% of the younger participants had a television in the bedroom as children is alarming. Having a television in the bedroom may be problematic for the following reasons: (1) it may encourage solo viewing rather than communal viewing; (2) it may limit the opportunity to develop and practice negotiation skills; (3) parents may have less control over what and when their children are watching television; (4) it increases the likelihood that television viewing will displace more valuable cognitive activities including reading and studying; and, (5) it may decrease the amount of time families spend together. Also, if the older participants' viewing habits and behaviors are representative of college educated females, the likelihood of the younger

participants having televisions in their bedrooms as they get older and have more disposable income is increased.

As to whom the participants watched television with, 33% of the women's first response was alone, 25% of the women's second response was alone and 17% of women's third response was alone. Coupling these findings with the fact that many women have television in their bedrooms clearly demonstrates that watching television is preventing college women from socializing and spending time with people, especially their families. This finding is supported by the fact that many of the participants feel isolated when watching television. Beth, Irene and Linda all reported that they spent less productive and positive time with their families because they watched television alone in their bedroom. This finding supports the existing research that states White Americans do not use television as a family activity (Bennett, 1994).

It is interesting to note that with few exceptions none of the participants reported using their VCRs to time shift; however, all the participants reported having at least one VCR. In the interviews and the questionnaires, the participants did not report regularly videotaping television programs and watching them at a later date (although one participant reported in her interview that her boyfriend regularly videotaped programs for them). Also, they reported very little use of the VCR to watch rented movies.

Perhaps, these women did not talk about watching rented movies because they were being asked to focus on their television viewing experiences which, in their minds, may not have included the use of VCRs. However, it was surprising that more women did not discuss

using the VCR to videotape television programs. This is unusual because I have little time to watch television and use my VCR to time shift.

In addition, the television guide is designed with numerical codes representing each individual television program. These codes are used in conjunction with the VCR to provide a convenient method of videotaping television programs. Therefore, the television guide encourages videotaping television programs which indicates viewers at large <u>are</u> time shifting. Perhaps, the lack of time shifting on the part of the participants can be explained by their reasons for watching television. Many of the participants reported using television as a tool to socialize with friends; therefore, they made a point to watch television programs together as they aired. In addition, the participants indicated that television viewing was a scheduled activity and became part of their weekly routine.

<u>Number of Hours of Television Watched per Week</u>

The finding that the younger participants watch 11.5 hours of television per week and the older participants watch 10.5 hours of television per week was significantly lower than the finding of Comstock (1978). Comstock (1978) reported that women between the ages of 18 and 49 watch 31.5 hours of television per week. Perhaps the following two reasons serve as explanations for the difference in findings: (1) more women have entered the work force since 1978 and have considerably less time to watch television; and (2) 100% of the participants were students, 58% worked in some capacity, and many indicated that they were involved in other school and family related activities which may have left less time to watch television compared to non college females.

What the Participants Watch on Television

The findings that show what the participants watch on television are not surprising and support the work of Albarran and Umphrey (1993). In this study, it was found that college females most often watch: situation comedies (92%); television news and evening news magazines (92%); and, television movies (83%), respectively. Albarran and Umphrey (1993) reported that White Americans most often watch: news programs and news magazines; television movies; and situation comedies, respectively. The only difference between the findings of this study and the above study is the order of preference.

What was interesting about this finding is that many television situation comedies feature Black Americans and none of the participants reported watching situation comedies featuring Black Americans with the exception of the *Cosby Show*. It is important to note that all of the participants in this study were White Americans. This finding supports the Identification Model (Comstock, 1989).

Why the Participants Watch Television

The findings show that more of the younger participants (83%) watched television to escape. Only 33% of the older participants watched for this reason. This finding was not surprising because college women between the ages of 18 and 23 are still developing socially, are often living away from home for the first time, are experimenting and learning about their sexuality, and are finding their places in society. This period of their lives may be stressful and confusing; consequently, they may turn to

television as a form of escape as well as a source of information. Older college women (ages 30-45) may be less likely to encounter the above stresses and, in turn, may not use television for the same reasons.

This finding raises a disturbing issue because the younger participants watch day time talk shows to escape. This study already shows that day time talk shows often focus on sensational issues and violence, especially violence against women. If young college females are watching day time talk shows to escape the daily pressures which are common to their age group, does watching day time talk shows provide them with a healthy form of escape? It probably does not.

The findings show that more of the older participants (83%) rather than the younger participants (33%) watch television for companionship. This finding was not surprising because many of the older participants lived away from campus in suburban communities, lived independently, have additional responsibilities including family and house maintenance and had less opportunity than the younger participants to socialize.

In addition to the above finding, it was also found that the participants enjoyed watching long-standing television programs because they count on seeing the same television characters and personalities week after week. The combination of these two findings, watching television as a source of companionship and enjoying the same television characters week after week, suggests that television is adding to the repertoire of relationships in college women's lives. Coupling this with the finding that the majority of participants watch television alone, suggests that television may be replacing human relationships, especially within families.

Parents' Educational Attainment

The findings from this study show that the participants whose parents had a high school education or less watched on average six more hours of television per week compared to the participants whose parents had more than a high school education. In addition, the findings show that the three older participants whose parents had a high school education or less also had one to three additional televisions in their homes. This finding is alarming because it suggests that parents who have a high school education or less are more likely to own more television sets, watch more television and have children who watch more television. This study has already shown that more television sets in the home, especially in the bedroom, encourage solo rather than communal viewing and often lead to feelings of isolation. In addition, this finding suggests that television viewers with a high school education or less may be developing unhealthy television viewing habits.

Overall, the findings from this study show that the participants' average estimated annual income as well as their parents' average estimated annual income was higher than expected. The participants had slightly more access to television than the national average and watched less television than the national average. The findings that show what the participants watch on television and why they watch television are consistent with the existing research (Albarran & Umphrey, 1993; Huston et al., 1991). The findings show that the participants whose parents had a high school education or less watch more television than those participants whose parents had more than a high school education. Lastly, the findings show that three of the older participants whose

parents had a high school education or less own more televisions than those participants whose parents had more than a high school education.

Support for the Methodology

There are two findings from this study that clearly support the use of in-depth phenomenological interviewing as a method to investigate women's experiences. The first, and perhaps most obvious finding, is the volume of information that the method generated on college women's experiences with television viewing. The 36 interviews generated 1,443 pages of single spaced transcripts. The wealth and variety of information generated from the 1,443 pages of transcripts contributed to the depth, volume and honesty of this report.

Also supporting the methodology are findings from the existing research in relation to the findings from this study. The majority of existing research on television and women investigates how women are portrayed on television rather than women's subjective experiences with television viewing. Television viewers, especially female television viewers, are seldom asked to discuss their experiences with television viewing and are seldom asked to create meaning from those experiences. Therefore, the ability of existing research to report on women's experiences with television viewing is limited.

Throughout this report, the reader has seen that the participants of this study are both angry and frustrated about the negative portrayals of women and women's issues on television. In addition, because the feelings of the participants are expressed through their own words, the reader has a better understanding of the potential consequences of the

negative portrayals of women on television. It is the participants' anger and frustration, expressed in their own words, that sets this research project apart and serves as a support for the use of in-depth phenomenological interviewing as a method to gather information about women's lives.

For example, the finding that shows that the older participants are both angry and offended by the advertisements of feminine hygiene products on television does not appear in the existing research. The fact that this finding does not appear in the literature is not surprising.

The likelihood of feminine hygiene products emerging as an issue was increased in this study because in-depth phenomenological interviewing focuses on women's subjective experiences and uses language as a means to communicate those experiences. In this case, the interviewer was a woman. It is doubtful that the advertising of feminine hygiene products on television would have been raised as an issue if the above three factors were not present during the interview process. Findings such as this one and the candidness with which the participants described their television viewing experiences support the need for new research methods in relation to women's experiences and the expansion on this in-depth phenomenological method in relation to women's television viewing experiences.

Chapter Summary

Most of the research that focuses on women and their television viewing examines how women are portrayed on television. Few of these studies include women's subjective experiences with television viewing

and the meaning they create from these experiences. The literature suggests that women's experiences are absent from the literature for the following reasons: (1) stereotypically, women's characteristics and primary associations have not been deemed worthy of research; (2) women are seen as poor communicators; and, (3) women do not see themselves as agents of change. This study demonstrates that women's characteristics, primary associations, and their television viewing experiences are worthy of research. In addition, this study demonstrates that women are excellent communicators and do see themselves as agents of change, at least in relation to their television viewing. Also, this study challenges the rationale for why many women have been absent from social science research and helps to bring women's voices into the center of educational and social science theory and research.

Unfortunately, the findings from this study show more of a negative link between television viewing and social learning and cognitive skills. The finding that television viewing is negatively associated with the formation and maintenance of attitudes and beliefs, especially gender related issues and self esteem, is important from an educational standpoint. The most alarming finding reveals that television viewing negatively influences the younger participants' attitudes and beliefs about: (1) their own body images and (2) career opportunities.

These findings are attributed to the way that the majority of women on television are depicted. Women on television are commonly portrayed as young, thin, and physically beautiful. These findings are disturbing because the findings show that television is communicating unrealistic ideas about women. In addition, it demonstrates that female viewers' social learning is affected by the content on television. The consequences

of this finding suggest that young female viewers, who believe that they do not look like television women, are at risk of believing that their chances of pursuing their desired careers are limited.

On the positive side, the findings demonstrate that female college viewers look to television for positive role models. This finding suggests that social learning is positively associated with television viewing because the admired television women exhibit prosocial behavior. The only negative aspect of this finding is that many of the television women that are admired are fictional characters and appear in situation comedies. This suggests that television may be communicating unrealistic and inaccurate information about women's lives. In addition, the fact that many of the admired television women appear in situation comedies suggests that the participants are not taking the women seriously. This finding has negative implication because all of the fictional female characters are shown in professional environments, which suggests that working women on television are not valued or taken seriously.

Perhaps one of the most alarming findings from this study is that television viewing is associated with negative emotions and behaviors. The findings show that the participants adopted a view of the world that reflects the violence found on television news and fictional programming. Many of the participants report that they frequently feel unsafe, distrusted people and were afraid to leave their homes after watching television news and television tabloids. This finding is disturbing for two reasons: (1) the violence on television does not realistically reflect the violence in real life (Comstock, 1989), which demonstrates that television is communicating inaccurate information, and (2) television violence is on the rise (Hanson & Knopes, 1993).

The Observational Learning Theory helps to explain why the participants report adopting a view of the world that reflects the violence found on television. The Observational Learning Theory suggests that "a good deal of learning occurs through vicarious rather than personal experience" (Mazur, 1990, p. 269). This finding suggests that as more women watch violent television, the more likely they are to be afraid to participate in activities outside of their homes.

In relation to emotions and behaviors, the findings show that television viewing is negatively associated with overeating. This finding suggests that female college television viewers are at risk of developing coronary heart disease, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. Also, this finding suggests that female television viewers are at risk of developing sedentary lifestyles and unhealthy habits that may be detrimental to their lives.

The findings show that cognitive skills and activities are negatively affected by television viewing. The findings show that television viewing significantly displaces reading and study time among female college students. Furthermore, the findings show evidence that creativity and imagination are negatively linked to television viewing. Many of the participants watch television because the activity is not mentally challenging and does not require a lot of thinking. Another disturbing finding is that the participants watch television news, day time talk shows, and made-for-television movies to learn and be informed. This finding is disturbing because none of the above television programs incorporate cinematic codes into their programs that have been shown to aid learning and information processing. Furthermore, many of these television programs focus on violence. This finding suggests that female viewers

may be less well informed than non television viewers and may be learning that the world is a mean and hostile place, especially for women.

On the positive side, the findings show that female college students learn from television content that they either relate to or identify with. As long as the information that the viewers are seeking is prosocial, the educational consequences may be positive.

The Identification Model helps to explain why the participants report learning from television content that they either relate to or identify with. The Identification Model suggests that when television viewers identify with television characters or television content, they are more likely to experience a portrayal as instructive (Comstock, 1989). Furthermore, Comstock (1989) suggests that "television entertainment is particularly likely to function as instruction[al] when persons portrayed are perceived by viewers as somehow similar to themselves-a circumstance certainly achieved at many points in television drama" (p. 190).

The majority of the demographic findings are consistent with the existing research. The findings show that the participants' average estimated annual income as well as their parents' average estimated annual income was higher than expected. The participants had slightly more access to television than the national average and watched less television than the national average. Perhaps, the two findings that have the most negative educational consequences are the following: (1) the participants whose parents had a high school education or less watch more television than those participants whose parents had more than a high school education and (2) three of the older participants whose parents had a high school education or less own more televisions than

those participants whose parents had more than a high school education. The combination of these last two findings suggests that as more less educated parents watch more television and own more televisions, the likelihood of their children modeling their television viewing habits is increased; consequently, a negative cycle may be created.

The findings from this study clearly show that the repetitious messages and images commonly seen and heard on television negatively affect: (1) attitudes and beliefs about gender related issues and self esteem; (2) expectations and beliefs about the real world; (3) the formation and maintenance of emotions and behaviors; and, (4) specific cognitive skills and activities. On the positive side, the findings show that when used correctly, television is linked to the formation and maintenance of positive attitudes and beliefs about women in general. Unfortunately, this finding is linked to viewing positive portrayals of women on television and this study clearly demonstrates that women and women's issues are often negatively portrayed on television.

The findings from this study suggest that female college students who watch television are at greater risk than non-television viewers of developing unhealthy and unrealistic beliefs about themselves, adopting a view of the world that reflects the violence found on television, and limiting their chances of life success because television viewing often displaces valuable activities and experiences.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter is divided into three sections: (1) a summary which reviews the findings from this study; (2) the conclusions resulting from the findings in this study; and, (3) the recommendations for future research and action.

Summary

Although the findings from a qualitative study can not be generalized to the entire population, they is an indication of trends in attitudes in particular populations. The overriding theme of the findings is that the women studied believe that women and women's issues are negatively portrayed on television. Furthermore, the women in this study were both angry and frustrated about the negative depiction of women and women's issues on television.

The study found that attitudes and beliefs were both positively and negatively associated with television viewing. Television viewing was linked to the formation and maintenance of negative attitudes and beliefs, especially gender-related issues and self esteem among the younger participants. Television viewing was positively linked to social learning in relation to television women who served as role models.

The study found that negative emotions and behaviors were associated with television viewing. Television viewing was positively associated with influencing and shaping expectations and beliefs about the real world. Television viewing was linked to the participants'

adoption of fearful attitudes that reflect the violence found on television and the belief that the world is a mean and scary place. And, lastly, to a surprising extent, television viewing was linked to overeating.

The participants in this study were critical of the television media including local and national news and television tabloids. The participants believed that the television media focused on the sensational and negative, did not respect people's privacy, negatively affected legal cases and, was too powerful, especially in relation to influencing public opinion.

Some findings were true of all age groups but other findings were age specific. The older participants felt that they had control over their television viewing by shutting off the television, changing the channel, canceling cable subscriptions and encouraging other viewers, especially women, to take an active stand against the negative images on television.

Television viewing was both positively and negatively linked to cognitive skills and activities. On the positive side, it was found that television viewing increased learning if participants related to and identified with the television content. On the negative side, it was found that television viewing displaced reading and study time and was negatively linked to loss of creativity and imagination.

This study showed that the participants had greater access to television than the national average, watched less television per week than the national average and often watched television alone and without their families. Also, the older participants owned more televisions than the national average.

The participants reported watching television to learn and be informed (83%) and to relax and be entertained (75%). Also, the

participants reported watching television because the activity acted as a source of escape (58%), as a source of companionship (58%), as a way of socializing and feeling connected to people (58%), and as a relief from boredom (42%). Lastly, the participants reported watching television to view positive portrayals of people (25%) and because it provided a source of comfort and consistency (25%).

The participants reported watching the following television programs: situation comedies (92%); television news and evening news magazines (92%); television movies (83%); educational programming (75%); drama (58%); soap operas (including day time and evening soap operas) (58%); day time talk shows (42%); science fiction (25%); action adventure (25%); music cable stations (17%); detective (8%); and, game shows (8%).

Conclusions

Based on what the women in this study said about their television viewing experiences, I conclude that they feel that the television industry does not value women on television in general. Perhaps this is true because both the television and advertising industries are dominated by men. I hope that as more women enter into these fields, the depiction of women on television will become more valued and realistic. Unfortunately, the inclusion of women into the television and advertising industry continues to be slow; consequently, the likelihood of women's roles on television improving in the immediate future is small.

However, the inclusion of more women in positions of influence in the television and advertising industry may not be sufficient. I am

concerned that as more women enter the television industry that marketing strategies and outside pressures to stay employed may lead women television writers and producers to develop certain kinds of saleable work that mirror what is currently marketable, that is, the negative depiction of women on television. Although one can not blame women for wanting to stay employed, this potential tactic will not improve women's roles on television and may not necessarily help keep women employed.

Based on the history of the way women have been depicted on television, I am not surprised that many of the participants of this study were negatively affected by their television viewing experiences. Historically, women on television are seen in the background and viewed as sexual objects. The majority of the time, women on television disappear as soon as they have fulfilled their function. This scenario happens so frequently on television, viewers hardly notice. This explains why many of the participants of this study, especially the younger participants, were not fully aware of the negative depiction of women on television until they were asked to recreate their television viewing experiences.

Who can criticize Frances and Kate for expressing low self-esteem and poor body image when they have been bombarded with stereotypical images of beautiful women on television for 20 years? It is not surprising that many of the participants expressed a view of the world that reflects the violence found on television when much of television is violent, especially violent against women. It was not surprising that television is displacing homework when more viewers have televisions in their bedrooms and are viewing alone.

More so now than ever, I am acutely aware that repetitious television messages and images, in this case the negative portrayals of women on television, gradually shape expectations and beliefs about the real world. Unless the industry, educators, parents, and viewers themselves actively take part in changing the representation of women on television, both female and male viewers may learn to adopt the attitudes, beliefs, values and ideology of the dominant culture.

Recommendations

This study acted as an "umbrella." It was broad in scope and revealed many important educational issues in relation to television viewing and social learning among female college students. Based on the findings from this study, my recommendations for future research and action are discussed below. This section is divided into four categories: (1) general television viewing populations; (2) female television viewing audiences; (3) specific issues related to television viewing; and (4) actions to promote college women's lives and critical television viewing.

Interestingly enough, none of the women in this study had sons. They all expressed concerns about how television viewing may be negatively affecting their daughters' lives. Therefore, researchers need to investigate the television viewing experiences of college women who have both sons and daughters to determine whether or not their television viewing experiences and the meaning that they create from those experiences are influenced by the gender of their children.

The women in this study felt that men on television appeared more frequently and were portrayed more positively than women on television.

Therefore, women's television viewing experiences and the meanings they create from their experiences may be different than men's television viewing experiences. For example, the research showed that White males appear more frequently on television than all other populations; consequently, White male viewers may feel more important and valued in their everyday lives than other viewing populations. It appears that television may not be interested in social equity. A recommendation is to investigate the television viewing experiences of male college students to determine whether or not their television viewing experiences and the meaning they have created from those experiences differ from those of female college television viewers. If so, what are the differences and what are the consequences?

In relation to women's television viewing, there are several areas of research that need to be conducted. The women in this study were more economically affluent than I had expected. This was surprising because they attended a public rather than a private university. Research should investigate the television viewing experiences of women from different socioeconomic classes to determine whether or not television viewing experiences and the meaning created from those experiences differ among women from different socioeconomic backgrounds. For example, do affluent women create different meanings than less affluent women from viewing television programs such as *Beverly Hills, 90210*, *Roseanne*, and *The Oprah Winfrey Show*? If so, what are the differences and what are the consequences?

In addition, more studies need to be conducted in relation to television and female ethnic viewing audiences. All of the participants in this study were White Americans. There is little research that investigates

the meaning that the following female populations make from their television viewing experiences: American Indian, Asian American, Black American and Hispanic American. It is important to investigate the television viewing experiences of these populations to: (1) give these female viewing audiences voice; and (2) determine whether or not ethnic backgrounds influence their television viewing experiences and the meaning these populations create from those experiences.

This study investigated women who attended college rather than women who did not attend college. The fact that this study investigated women who attended college rather than those who did not, is of particular interest to me for three reasons: (1) educated women were more negatively affected than I had anticipated by the stereotypical images of women on television; (2) this study found that the participants whose parents had a high school education or less, compared to the participants whose parents had more than a high school education, watched more television and had more televisions in their homes; and (3) previous research found that for girls, greater prejudice against their own gender was predicted by their mothers' higher educational attainment. Therefore, what needs to be further investigated is the television viewing experiences of women who attend and do not attend college to determine whether or not their television viewing experiences and the meaning created from those experiences differ among college educated women and less educated women. These findings can have an important impact on women's lives.

Television viewing among sorority college women was of particular interest to me because as a college professor I regularly interact with sorority women. This study showed that sorority college women

may be using television differently than nonsorority college women. For example, the two sorority women in this study indicated that they and as their sorority sisters watched television programs such as *Beverly Hill, 90210* and *Melrose Place* to obtain information about life after college. This is important because television portrayals are often unrealistic. A recommendation is to investigate the television viewing experiences of sorority college women and nonsorority college women to determine whether or not television viewing experiences and the meaning created from those experiences differ among these viewing populations.

This study found that television viewing displaced reading and study time among female college students. This issue is of particular interest to me because, as a professor and professional woman, I am concerned that if college women are not taking advantage of their academic pursuits, they may be less well equipped to be competitive in the working world. Therefore, it is important to investigate whether or not television viewing negatively affects women's ability to be competitive in the working world. These findings can have an important impact on women's professional lives.

A recurring theme among the women in this study was the negative impact of violence on television. This theme is of particular interest because much of the research on television violence includes children. This study found that female adults were also negatively affected by watching violence on television. Therefore, it is important to investigate the television viewing experiences of women to determine if television viewing is linked to the adoption of fearful attitudes that reflect the violence on television. Also, does turning on the television, which

often focuses on violence, to drown out alarming noises, actually increase and contribute to women's fears? If it does, what are the consequences?

The above research needs to be conducted so that educators, researchers, and television viewers have a better understanding of how television shapes their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors; however, immediate actions can be taken to begin this process. The process can begin in schools. I believe that educators can begin to make positive changes by making students more intelligent and critical viewers. For example, colleges and universities should be alerted to the negative educational consequences of television viewing among female college students so that they can further develop and implement media studies programs into their curriculum. Such programs will help develop more intelligent and critical viewers and, ultimately, will help create social change in relation to the negative representation of women on television.

Also, colleges and universities can begin to develop and implement mentorship programs (if they already have not) for college women. These programs should be designed to counteract the negative and unrealistic images of women on television, especially professional women on television, and to promote the growth of women's personal and professional lives. Also, it is recommended that these mentorship programs include mentors of both genders and, from several fields of study and varied life experiences so that they can bring as much balance and diversity as possible to the mentorship experience.

Lastly, families need to take responsibility for and an active role in their television viewing experiences. This issue is particularly important because the majority of the women in this study reported, with disappointment, that they watch television alone. If more families made a

conscious decision to watch television together and discuss what they were watching, families would become more critical viewers and perhaps would find their television viewing experiences to be more pleasurable and educationally rewarding.

Chapter Summary

I hope this study realistically and fairly presents college women's experiences with television viewing. Furthermore, I hope that this study: (1) presents meaningful work that is worthy of others' attention; (2) contributes to the existing research in women and their subjective experiences with television viewing; (3) helps to bring women's voices into the center of educational and social science research; (4) inspires other female researchers to examine women's experiences; and (5) encourages self-discovery and empowerment on the participants and readers of the study, especially in relation to their own television viewing experiences and the education consequences of those experiences.

Also, I hope that this study and its findings, especially the findings that demonstrated that 92% of the women in this study were angry and offended by the negative portrayals of women on television, provide a wake up call to the television executives, producers, writers and directors as well as to members of the advertising industry. Women constitute approximately 58% of the television viewing audience (Zoglin, 1991) and female viewers outnumber male viewers three to two in all time slots (Gregor, 1993). Also, television advertisers' largest market is female viewers because they are believed to make the most buying decisions in American households (Gregor, 1993). The assertion by women in this

study that they are taking greater control over their viewing by shutting off their televisions, changing the channels, and encouraging other viewers to speak out against the negative portrayals of women on television is an important message for the television industry.

As a professor in a public university and as a woman, I was surprised not so much by what the study found but to the extent to which the women expressed their emotions and feelings about their television viewing experiences. Many of the participants entered the interview process defensive about their relationship with television; they believed that there was none. It was rewarding to witness their realization that their relationship with television not only existed but that it was important. Upon concluding the interview process, many of the women expressed gratitude that they had increased their awareness and sense of power in relation to their television viewing and their lives as women in general.

I was also surprised by the emotions that the methodology and research topic evoked from the women in the study. The participants were grateful to tell their stories about their television viewing experiences and were grateful to have been taken seriously while doing so. I feel that the element of being taken seriously helped to create a rich research environment and an equitable experience for both the researcher and the participants of this study.

Furthermore, I was surprised to discover that there was a generation gap in relation to women and their television viewing experiences. For example, I have never been consciously offended by female hygiene television commercials. The study also showed that none of the younger participants found this issue to be important enough to

discuss. The older participants, however, were offended by these images and messages, reinforcing the existence of a generation gap among female college television viewing audiences.

I felt fortunate to be part of the interview process because I was positively affected by the participants' life experiences, especially those of the older women. Ironically, many of the women cited me as a role model and encouraged me in my professional pursuits; however unbeknown to them, many of the women acted as role models for me because of their knowledge, trust, and open display of emotions and life experiences. By listening to their stories, I became increasingly aware that women's lives are valuable and worth sharing.

I am not pleased about the findings of this study; however, I am optimistic about the research process. I feel strongly that as more research is conducted on women's experiences with television viewing and as more women's voices are heard, the more women's lives on and off television will be valued. I hope that the readers of this study leave it feeling empowered to make positive changes in relation to women's television viewing experiences and the representation of women on television. I leave this study with a greater commitment to pursuing and hearing women's voices and encouraging others to do the same.

APPENDIX A

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

To the participants of this study:

Please take a few minutes to fill out the following questionnaire. Leave any questions blank that you do not wish to answer.

The following information is being gathered to gain a better understanding of college women's experiences with television viewing. In all written material and verbal presentations in which I may use the following material, pseudonyms will be substituted for all names of persons, schools, cities, towns, and counties. Every step will be taken to adequately disguise your identity in any published materials or presentations.

You may withhold any part of the following data used if you notify me within five days of the last interview.

This page will be detached from the following questionnaire.

Name: _____

Address:

_____

_____

Phone: _____

SELF

Academic status: _____

Major (field of study): _____

What is your marital status? _____

Do you have children? _____

If so, what are their ages and gender?

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

Occupation (indicate full/part time): _____

Annual income (include spouse if appropriate): _____

FAMILY

How many siblings do you have (indicate gender and age):

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

Mother's education: _____

Mother's occupation: _____

Did your mother work when you were a child (indicate when)?

_____

Father's education: _____

Father's occupation: _____

Did your father work when you were a child (indicate when)?

_____

Parents' annual income: _____

TELEVISION VIEWING

What types of television programs do you prefer to watch (situation comedy, detective, action-adventure, science-fiction, soap operas, drama, news, educational, movies, talk show, game show, etc.):

What television programs do you watch on a regular basis (name specific television programs):

How many hours of television do you watch per week: _____

What time of the day do you watch the most television: _____

Whom do you watch television with:

How many television sets did you have in your home growing up:
____

Did you have a television set in your bedroom when you were growing up: _____

Has there ever been a videocassette recorder (VCR) in your parents' home when you were growing up: _____

Please answer the following questions if you do not live with your parents now:

How many television sets do you have in your home: _____

Do you have a television set in your bedroom: _____

Do you own a videocassette recorder: _____

In filling out this questionnaire and signing this form, you are assuring me that you will make no claim, financial or otherwise, resulting from the use of this information. You are also stating that no medical treatment will be rendered by you from The University of Massachusetts, . . . or myself should any injury result from filling out this questionnaire. Furthermore, you are 18 years of age or older and have every right to contract in your own name in the above regard.

Thank you for being part of this research project.

I, _____, have read the above statement, am fully familiar with the contents thereof and I agree to the conditions stated.

_____
Signature of Participant

_____
Date

_____
Signature of Interviewer

APPENDIX B

WRITTEN CONSENT FORM

WRITTEN CONSENT FORM

To the participants of this study:

My name is Karen Burke and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Massachusetts located in Amherst, Massachusetts. In addition, I am a Professor in the . . . at . . . As part of my doctoral requirement, I am conducting research based on college women's experiences with television viewing.

As part of this study, you are being asked to participate in three, ninety minute, interviews. This first interview will focus on your experience with television viewing before you came to college. The second interview will focus on your present experience with television viewing. And, the third interview, based on your past and present experiences, will explore what television viewing means to you. The purpose of this research is not to determine "truth", as in absolute terms, but rather to try to understand your experience. Throughout the interview, I (the interviewer) may ask occasional clarifying questions; however, my main responsibility is to listen to your experiences within the structure of these three interviews.

My goal is to analyze the material from your interviews in order to have a better understanding of college women's experiences with television viewing. More specifically, I am interesting in learning how college women make meaning out of that experience including their television viewing habits and patterns and their perceptions of how television viewing influences them as women.

The interviews will be audio-taped and later transcribed by myself or a reputable transcriber. In all written material and verbal presentations in which I may use material from your interview, pseudonyms will be substituted for all names of persons, schools, cities, towns, and counties. In other words, transcripts will be typed with fictitious names. Every step will be taken to adequately disguise your identity in any published materials or presentations.

You may withdraw from the interview process at any time. You may withhold any part of the interview data used if you notify me within five days of the last interview.

In signing this form, you are assuring me that you will make no claim, financial or otherwise, resulting from the use of this material in your interviews. You are also stating that no medical treatment will be rendered by you from The University of Massachusetts, . . . or myself should any injury result from participating in these interviews. Furthermore, you are 18 years of age or older and have every right to contract in your own name in the above regard.

Thank you for considering being part of this research project. I look forward to working with you.

I, _____, have read the above statement, am fully familiar with the contents thereof and I agree to participate as an interviewee under the conditions stated.

_____
Signature of Participant

_____
Date

_____
Signature of Interviewer

APPENDIX C

WITHDRAWAL FORM

WITHDRAWAL FORM

To the participant of this study:

The following form verifies that _____ (print name) has withdrawn from the interview process based on college women's experiences with television viewing conducted by Karen Burke. This form verifies the following:

1) the audio-tape(s) from the participant's interview(s) has been returned to her;
2) no other copy of the audio-tape(s) exists; and
3) no material generated from the participant's interview(s) will be used as part of my research project based on college women's experiences with television viewing or in any other future publication.

In signing this form, you are verifying that the audio-tape(s) from your interview(s) has been returned to you. Furthermore, you are 18 years of age or older and have every right to contract in your own name in the above regard.

Thank you for your participation in this research project.

I, _____ (print name), have read the above statement, am fully familiar with the contents thereof and confirm that the above conditions have been met.

_____
Signature of Participant

_____
Date

_____
Signature of Interviewer
(Karen P. Burke)

_____
Date

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